

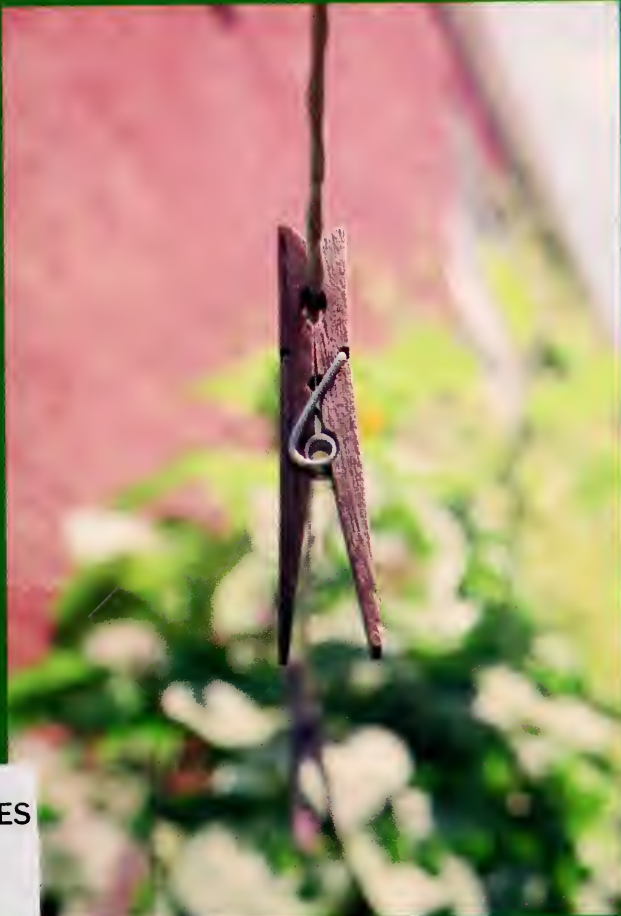
SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE



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RED CLAY

Spring 2006



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RED CLAY

Spring 2006

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Jessica Baker

Not a Place

I live here, in dorm room 331,
Where tigers and Chinese dragons
Hang on the wall, facing a dreamcatcher
Beside dried flowers that sit next to a
Basil plant that keeps losing leaves
Underneath a hammock - hung from the AC -
That represents my hope of one day
Having a place to use it;
Where my mini fridge hums at 4 am
Until it wakes me up, alone,
Without even a snoring roommate.

I also live 3 hours north and a bit east,
Where my once-blue room is now green,
On the floor above the kitchen
Where my smiling dog begs perpetually
For food from my mother
But runs barking when a child
rings our doorbell and asks
For my sister, who stole my place
At the computer with the L-shaped desk.

But neither of these places are my home.
Home happens when I'm lying down
On my friend's rug with a pillow, and I have
A book that I'm not really reading because
I'm listening to the sound of her typing.

Sarah Ansani

One Last Time

Nearly sixty, Buk is a simple man
waking dry as gin at 2:36pm. He drinks flat beer
as the sultry hips of Marilyn Monroe
curve beyond the edges of the frame
on his wall. "She speaks to me," he says
to the naked broad spread out like Jesus on his bed.

"Am I more than just another stain on your bed?"
the broad named Bonnie asks. Buk guesses a real man
would blame the stains on love. Instead, he says,
"No, no. You're just another babe full of beer."
Somewhere a dusty piano displays the framed
photo of Bonnie, as blond as fame, like Marilyn Monroe.

Bonnie is envious of Marilyn Monroe.
Closing her legs and mouth, she rises from bed
like a heavy jazz. The piano's dazzling frame
never creaked beneath the weight of this sensual woman
who sang "Happy Birthday" to men full of beer.
She puckers her lips, squints and says,

"It's not woman but womb that man craves." Buk says,
"No," to the scattered clothes, to Marilyn Monroe,
who sighs and shifts on a wall the color of beer.
"We crave voluptuous vices that lead us to beds
of blankets or dirt--it's the same for all men,"
Buk replies as he winks at the vixen crawling from her frame,

legs first, followed by hips. Bonnie stares past the window frame.
Sometimes there is nothing more that needs to be said.
Bonnie thinks of her husband, a respectable man
hunched over stiffened piano keys, as Marilyn Monroe,

one step at a time, approaches Buk's bed.
He thoughtlessly opens another bottle of beer.

Bonnie always pretended to love the beer,
the sex, the rouge. Standing at the door frame,
she stares at the brute on his bent bed
one last time. Then she's gone. Buk says,

"Ah, to die of sleep with a gut full of beer, like Marilyn Monroe,
is a death good enough for any god-damned man."

As empty as the "o" in God and rank with beer,
Buk watches as Marilyn Monroe locks the door into its frame
and says, "One last time, Buk," then joins him in bed.

Our Eulogy to the Graffiti Tree

I exhale. The end of my cigarette glows a sullen orange. The highway wind snatches the plume of smoke from my lips and sucks it through the pick-up's open window. Andrew, my brother, is driving; our sister Myra is settled between us, her eyes hooded in shadow, her hair as limp and dirty as leftover spaghetti. My side is pressed into the door. It will be at least another hour until we reach our destination: a brown, barren hill far beyond the last outposts of civilization. How Andrew knows that particular lump of land from any of the others that surround it, I can't guess. I flick the cigarette through the window, watch its embers tumble to the smothering pavement and die.

Myra's chin drops to her protruding collarbone. She sleeps like a bird; her small, dark eyes are shut, yet somehow still alert under the lids. Andrew's eyes are fixed on the road ahead of us. The back of his neck is sunburned a deep red, almost burgundy. He does not speak. The radio offers two stations this far into the country: the traffic and a twenty-four hour sermon occasionally punctuated by hymns and football scores. I examine the dirt collected under my fingernails. The ragged edges are getting longer. My knife is in Andrew's pocket, hugged by fading denim. If he leaves it there long enough, it will rub an imprint in the jeans, just as his wallet has. Myra wears a shapeless, floral print dress, twenty years older than she is. One of the buttons is missing; we replaced it with a paperclip to hide the yellowing lace of her bra.

Commercial vehicles dominate the highway; eighteen wheelers groan past us. The drivers hunch over the wheels, making their cross-country journeys alone. Their heads never turn from the endless tongue of gray extending before them. I make note of the license plate tags as they pass. Kentucky. Iowa. Oregon. Andrew and I played this game the day he drove the twenty-three miles east to the nearest hospital. He was seventeen

and I was thirteen, and we counted eight states together, me through the blood dripping down my forehead. Now, in the pick-up, Myra leaning against me just so, my eyes drift shut; the license plates swim in the hazy expanse behind my lids. Andrew, two years ago exactly, said "Look, Tommy, Alaska. They're from all the way across the world."

*

I'm waking up and the truck is stopped. My fingernails have bitten into my cheek, leaving five pink crescents along the bone. Myra is stretching and yawning. Andrew is rummaging behind the seats. He produces two dry-cleaning bags. The plastic crackles. Inside are the two suits we bought at the Goodwill last week. He hands me mine; his expression silences me before I can think to protest. The suit is the color of ash; sweat stains ooze from under the arms of the white dress shirt. I survey the surroundings. Andrew's truck is parked on the bald side of the hill. Myra sits in the truck bed, kicking her feet. Her flip flops – one green, one orange – dangle from one lax hand. Her bird eyes are vacant. I pull my tee-shirt off over my head.

"This is stupid," I say against the thin cotton.

"Don't be a jerk," Andrew warns me.

"Quit trying to be a parent," I reply. My skin prickles in the open air.

"Then stop acting like you need one." He buttons his shirt, the open cuffs hang around his knuckles. "Myra hasn't asked for anything except this. Can't you do anything for someone else?"

The dress shirt hangs open over my jeans. I look at my sister. She stares at nothing. At the top of our hill, there is a smooth patch of newly flattened soil. The tree has long since been cleared away, but it once loomed here, its spiky green needles offering neither shade nor comfort.

*

Myra insisted we buy the suits. She dragged us into Goodwill. Used wedding dresses hung on the back wall. She ran her fingers across other women's lace and silk, across their fabric

flowers and plastic pearls. She picked up a single high heel, stained with champagne, and held it at eye level. Andrew took a suit jacket from the rack and slid it over his broad shoulders. The cuffs hugged at his forearms two inches above the wrist. He frowned at me.

At least pretend to make an effort, his expression said. Myra fiddled with someone's discarded furs; the glassy eyes of a fox watched me from its perch on her chest. A single whisker protruded below its black nose. Alive, that nose would be damp and snuffling, scenting for prey and predators. Limp, the head thudded against Myra, dressed as she was in its borrowed skin.

I can sense the beginning of the seizures now; the world takes on colored tinges. The worst of the attacks – the doctors called them episodes before I had the third one – are preceded by a crimson cast, the world doused in color as though I'd put on tinted sunglasses. That day, the Goodwill glowed red. It seemed to bleed from the fox fur and leak onto my siblings. Red dresses, red windows, red faces. I turned to Andrew to explain what was happening. I don't remember anything more. I never do. When I came back to myself, my brother was leaning over me. There was a secondhand pillow beneath my head, snatched from a nearby shelf. It was embroidered with the phrase "Home Sweet Home". Myra sat on my other side; she picked up one of my hands, lacing my fingers with her twiggy thin ones.

"Are you alright?" she asked. It was the first time she had spoken all day. Sometimes she goes weeks without saying a word; sometimes she never stops chattering. Squeezing my hand against her cold skin, she hummed and rocked back and forth. The song was familiar; it put me in mind of secondhand yellow sofas and arguments on the front porch. Andrew pushed my hair back from my forehead. The Goodwill was empty except for the three of us and the wizened old woman at the cashier. She blinked owlishly at me from behind thick lenses.

"Did anyone see?" I asked. Andrew shook his head. Myra blew on the knuckles of my captive hand. They were bleeding. My body was tired and bruised in the places where I'd thrashed

against the dirty linoleum, the chrome clothes racks. My pulse was still fast and we stayed on the floor for a while – Myra humming just off-key, Andrew stroking the crown of my head as one might a small child's.

*

The shirt collar itches against my neck; the suit smells like mouthwash and mothballs. Myra shoves a brown dandelion in the top button hole. Andrew's suit is wrinkled and a size too large; with his rumpled hair and scuffed work boots, he is a late groom, still hung-over from the bachelor party and dashing into the ceremony at the last moment. We climb the side of the hill; around us, the countryside ripples like waves in a muddy pond, the scar-tissue road slicing through the middle of it.

The tree was a larch, *Larix laricina*, and had stood alone for as long as any of us could remember. Larches are the only conifers that are not evergreen; in the autumn, they shed their narrow, pointed leaves as surely as any oak or maple. This particular specimen, its roots likely spreading to the very center of the hill, had been carved with the names of nearly one thousand picnickers. One stormy afternoon in August four summers ago, Andrew had scaled the first two-thirds of the tree, counting the inscribed signatures of several generations. Our mother called him down as the lightning strikes grew nearer, though not before he found them: *R. M. J. + S. N. P., 1974*. Our father's adolescent, clumsy hand had encircled their initials with a lopsided heart in a sea of similar messages, some commemorating anniversaries a century old. This massive record crashed to the ground two months ago, shaking its resident hillside, cracking its guts open on the infertile earth.

Myra kneels on the naked dirt, smudging her dress. She presses her palms into the soil. Andrew crouches on her left side. They are both fair haired and waxy pale, like our mother. Unlike me. I stand apart from them; the wind gusts over the hillside, tossing my bangs into my eyes, plastering Myra's dress to her near-skeletal body. Our mother took us here every summer. Sometimes our father came; sometimes he didn't.

Mom always packed a picnic: sticky peanut butter sandwiches on Wonderbread and sugary grape juice. The last time we went, before Mom started going to AA meetings and checked herself into rehab, I had already developed epilepsy. Myra started her quiet spells around the same time; she was fourteen then, her blonde hair cut tomboy short as always, wearing Andrew's outgrown overalls until they were stiff with sweat and dirt. Our mother let her; our father had ordered her into skirts throughout childhood. She tugs at the flower print dress now and whimpers. I see that she is crying. Andrew's head is bowed.

"Tommy?" Myra asks. Her voice is plaintive, younger than it should be. She is sixteen years old, yet extends her hands to me the way she did when we were children, playing in the backyard. Without Andrew's prompting, despite the writhing in my gut, I move to her other side. The three of us crouch in the tree's empty lot, vacated by its great fall. Myra buries her dirty hands in my hair, her wet face in my shirt front. "Tommy, the tree is dead," she tells me. I put my arms around her. There is a pressure on my back and Andrew is there too, holding the two of us together.

*

It was a Thursday afternoon and Andrew had baseball practice. He was sixteen and incapable of doing wrong; the hand-stitched ball sought his glove; he flew around the bases as if on a divine wind. I waved as I passed the dugout. The walk home was not far and I took my time. Our mother worked at the department store in the next town over; our father was sometimes employed as a mechanic, sometimes a sales clerk, sometimes a paper boy. Myra had walked home ahead of me with her friends, complaining that girls weren't allowed to play baseball. She played against Andrew and me when Dad wasn't home, scuffling eagerly in the dust for the ball, swinging the bat like a Major Leaguer in a city-sized stadium. When I arrived at the house, her backpack – a sexless navy blue – lay on the front steps. It was crumpled, as if it had been thrown.

I picked up the bag and pushed the screen door open.

The living room with its mustard colored sofa was cavernous and cold from the air conditioning. I heard a clinking sound in the kitchen. Our mother's cat, Edgar, licked a dirty fork in the sink. The table was empty; the Want Ads sat neatly folded on the yellow counter top. I dropped my bag and Myra's under the kitchen table. The three of us did homework together in that kitchen. It was harder to hear our parents yelling from there in the evenings, especially with the doors and windows closed. I took an apple from the fruit basket and bit into its pulpy flesh. It was crisp and tart; sometimes I can still taste it. I pushed through the swinging door back to the front hallway, Edgar at my heels. He purred – the sound of marbles rolling in a paper bag. I climbed the stairs. The room I shared with Andrew was the first on the left. Then, the bathroom.

Myra's door grimaced open an inch. Inside, my sister was crying on her bed; my father was standing over her. His face swelled dark red. He was whispering something, the way he hissed at our mother sometimes when she was drunk. His jeans sagged around his thighs but he was turned away; something in me churned. Myra's eye blossomed dark purple. One button was missing from her overalls and the hook was bent; her shirt was pushed up, showing her stomach. I groaned; the sound pushed past my lips and mushroomed until it became a yell. Our father turned then and raised his fist.

*

A fat raindrop hits the back of my neck. I pull away from my siblings and look at the sky. It is riotous, rolling like waves above the landscape. I stand up. The flat crest of the hill where the tree once stood extends around me. I lay my brown dandelion in the dirt. "You know, you can tell the age of a tree by counting the rings on the inside of the trunk," I say. Rings made of a thousand signatures? I wonder.

"This tree must have been well over a hundred," Andrew says. His voice is hoarse. "I could see clear to Harrisburg when I climbed it."

"It was a beautiful tree." Myra leans over and kisses the

dandelion. Her lips are parched and cracked. She smiles; one tooth is missing from the side. She left the hospital four months to the day of her rape; the psychiatric ward released her around the time that the twelve men and women appointed by the state sent our father to prison. She lost nineteen pounds in her time there and has continued to lose steadily. Even now it seems as if the wind will pluck her from the hilltop like an autumn leaf.

“Mom was sixteen when she first came here with her family,” Andrew offers. “She said she wanted her first kiss to be under the tree, and for her boyfriend to carve their initials with everyone else’s.”

“Dumb bitch,” I spit into the dirt and turn away. “Why didn’t she see through him?” My secondhand suit is little protection against the wind and the rain is falling harder now.

“It wasn’t her fault,” Myra says. For a moment, her tone is that of the older sister who beat me at baseball and checkers, who learned to whistle from our bachelor uncle, who could burp the alphabet in the cafeteria at lunchtime.

I don’t reply.

“It’s getting cold,” Andrew says. His tone is neutral. He looks at Myra and then me. “We should go. Are you ready?”

“We should all say something first,” Myra says. “Don’t people always say things at funerals? About how great the person was or everything they did for us or something?”

“Everyone is great when they’re dead,” I tell her and Andrew glares at me in the way older brothers do when they want to punch you.

“Rest in peace, tree,” Andrew says. Myra smiles at him and her greasy hair flops into her face. “I hope tree heaven is a good place to be.”

“You remembered everything, tree. We’ll remember you. Mom remembers you. I remember you. Even Tommy will remember you when he stops being an asshole.” Myra turns to me, expectant of the transformation I don’t intend to give. I can’t. I couldn’t visit her in the psychiatric ward, either, even when my injuries had healed. I had my first seizure – no longer mere

episodes, three strikes you're out, thanks for playing – on the day she came home.

I grind the dandelion into the dirt under the sole of my shoe. “Goodbye tree. If it wasn't for you, who knows? I probably wouldn't be standing here.”

R. M. J. + S. N. P., 1974. There is bile in the back of my throat. It would be stupid to cry now. It would be stupid to have another seizure. Here, on the barren hillside, with remains of my family. I've had them at school, walking home, at the dinner table. Without warning.

I exhale. I'm looking up at the rain. My sister is next to me, holding my hand. My brother is above me. Below me, the roots of the graffiti tree extend like a thousand signatures.

Sarah Ansani

Indian Sunflower



Jessica Baker

Japanese Beetles

They come each July,
Spontaneously generating
Thousands of gilded copper shells.
They put holes in my green beans.
They are black spots, polluting
The heavy air as they fly
Like jalopies.

They enjoy a public orgy
In my garden - how rude! -
Their lustrous jade heads mocking
The wholesome plants below them.
They scuttle over each other
On six segmented legs, showing off
Their cheap underwear, decorated
With white sequins - so gaudy.

I glare in disgust at the sight.
Rage - how could these invading insects
Insult my tomatoes and beans?
I would shout at them, "get out!"
But I would be ignored. Instead:
My nails dig into my palms,
I lean over the garden fence and
Flick!
The vile beetles crash to the ground.

A Tint of Yellow

When I was younger, my dad jokingly told me that if the other kids made fun of me for being Asian, I should retaliate. If they mocked my slanted eyes, he said, I should widen my eyes so they bulge out and yell back “I’m American!” Because that’s what I am. An American.

In search of better opportunities, my parents emigrated from South Korea in their early twenties. While my mom left behind everyone from her immediate family, my dad was later joined by the rest of his family as they, too, also immigrated to the United States. I was born in Tampa, Florida. My dad attended the University of South Florida, simply for the sake of learning, oblivious that a college degree could help him find a job in the future. With his poor English abilities, he resorted to numbers and majored in electrical engineering. My parents struggled - while my dad pursued higher education, both of them worked jobs to make ends meet and on top of that, had to raise a newborn child. My mom waitressed at a Chinese restaurant, while my dad worked as a “house boy” for a wealthy family, acting as their personal chauffeur and cleaning up after them. After graduating, my dad secured a job on a naval base, and we relocated to Oxnard, California.

A minority in a predominantly Hispanic and white population, my parents found solace in a Korean United Methodist Church, where all of the members are Korean, the food provided for lunch is Korean, and the services are in Korean. My parents made me go to Korean language school every Saturday at church. We learned the Korean alphabet, read short stories, answered questions in workbooks, and memorized Korean tales for competitions. The person who recited the longest story, with no errors, was awarded a trophy. I never won. But at least back then, I had the confidence to speak in my native tongue. When I watch family home videos now, I’m amazed at how easily the Korean language once spewed out of my mouth.

As a child, I identified more with my Korean name.

Once day, when I was blowing bubbles outside our apartment, a dark-skinned Filipino girl passed by. We started talking, and I introduced myself as *Miri*, not Miriam. She became my first best friend, and although we have drifted apart since then, when we do talk, she continues to call me by that name. But she's the only friend who does. Nowadays, no one calls me *Miri* except for family members and the Korean adults at church.

The Korean culture pervaded my home during my childhood. My family would always take our shoes off before going inside. When meeting elders, my sisters and I would bow our heads as a sign of respect. My mother would buy groceries at the local Asahi market and cook us Korean meals - a mound of white rice on each plate, some sort of soup or stew (spinach, bean sprouts, seaweed, to name a few), and various side dishes that everyone would share. Occasionally she would cook spaghetti, but I would have to go to college to discover meatloaf, Salisbury steak, and pineapple upside-down cake. Imagine my surprise when I found out that people eat turkey and mashed potatoes more than once a year. Dessert for us usually consisted of fruit: Fuji apples, Korean pears, watermelon, honeydew, or my favorite, Korean grapes - suck the lime green gut out, discard the dark bluish-purple flesh, and spit out the seeds. I learned how to use chopsticks at an early age - it came as naturally to me as using a pen to write. Forks, I once believed, were only for little kids.

To celebrate New Year's, we could go to church every New Year's Eve and play a traditional Korean game called *yut-nori*. As a child, I didn't know how points were accumulated or how a team won the game - I simply enjoyed throwing the four, wooden sticks into the air. That night we would also eat *duk gook*, a warm soup consisting of rice cakes, broth, beef, scallions, and strips of egg sprinkled on top like confetti. The following morning, my father would wake us up early and we would all dress up in brightly colored *hanboks*, traditional Korean attire, and drive to homes of Korean elders, my grandparents' first. We'd line up in a row, say blessings for the new year, kneeling

down to bow to them as if they were kings and queens. They would give us money in return, sometimes as much as \$50, which my sisters and I would stuff into little pouches. But as years went by, my sister and I grew to hate the traditions. Why should we go to church when our friends are hanging out with each other or going to parties? Why do we have to wake up early when everyone else is probably sleeping in? Why do we have to wear dresses that are itchy, uncomfortable, and sometimes embarrassing to wear in public? Eventually, my parents would go to church on New Year's Eve without us. Sometimes my mom would try to convince us to make an appearance, to just go for the *duk gook* and then leave. We've also recently stopped going bowing on New Year's. Other than receiving money, I can't say I miss it.

There was a period in my life, however, when I immersed myself into Korean culture. I took Taekwondo classes three days a week, punching, kicking, blocking, bruising. I religiously watched "Three Guys, Three Girls," a Korean comedy sitcom when my mom brought home recorded videos from Asahi Market, understating most of the conversations but glancing at the English subtitles when necessary. I frequented Los Angeles' Korea Town and bought Korean pop CD's, listening and singing along to lyrics I didn't understand. I bought Korean magazines, not to read, but to tear out pages of Korean celebrities and singers and plaster my walls with them. At the time, Korean pop music was exploding in popularity, and it became a trend for Korean-Americans to follow. And like a typical adolescent, I conformed. But my interests later changed. My Korean CD's now sit behind closed cupboards, my blank walls are coated with white paint. I quit Taekwondo at brown belt and rarely watch Korean sitcoms or dramas on T.V.

Korea Town, an hour and a half drive from where we live, feels like a different country. As we drive by, I glance out the window and try to make out the signs, all in Korean characters. Other than the Mexicans occasionally seen working in Korean restaurants or grocery stores, or the few walking on the streets or

riding a bus, everyone in that community is Korean. My parents drive there to stock up on cheap groceries and Korean food that is difficult to find near our neighborhood. My sisters and I stock up on snacks - melon ice cream bars or small Jell-O cups, the ones with lychee in the middle that you suck out of a plastic container. My parents, more comfortable reading in their native language, also go to buy books in Korean text. And while we're there, we dine at a Korean restaurant. Although some now cater more to non-Korean customers, a lot don't - the menus are usually written in Korean, and the waitresses aren't usually fluent in English. Unlike a usual restaurant setting no one comes by your table asking how everything is going or if you need anything. If you need something, you call out to the waitress as she passes by. We often go to a BBQ place, where they grill the meat right in front of us so the smell of thinly cut, marinated beef seeps into our clothes. While in Korea Town, I'm surrounded by people who look just like me and who share the same culture. Yet why do I feel so distant, like I don't belong?

Perhaps if my parents had settled in the Los Angeles area, or somewhere with a large Korean population, I wouldn't feel so alienated. But they hadn't. My dad insists he did it on purpose: he didn't want us to stick with only Koreans; he wanted us exposed to different people. In elementary school, I had one Korean friend, but she wasn't even in my same class; I only knew her because our parents were friends and we'd often visit each other's houses. In junior high and high school, there were only a handful of Koreans other than me. In high school most of my close friends were Asians, but we stood apart from other Asians at school because we seemed more "Americanized," more conforming to the white culture. We weren't fluent in our respective languages, could understand but not reciprocate the communication. We wore Roxy, a clothing brand typically worn by surfers, and Paul Frank. We listened to indie, punk, and classical rock music, to bands such as The Beatles, The Postal Service, and Phoenix. There are names for people like us. "Twinkies" or "bananas" - yellow on the outside, but white on the inside. But

do we have to be labeled as such? Why can't we just be who we are? "White-washed" is a term that makes me cringe. If I were a white-washed fence, I'd have chips peeling off me with patches of yellow still visible. Because even if I appear Americanized, I am still tied to my roots.

To be quite honest, a lot of Asians at my high school annoyed me. The girls tended to giggle just a little too much, and the guys acted cocky and seemed too obsessed about cars. Perhaps I shouldn't overgeneralize; I know not all Asians are like that. In any case, I avoided associating with the very people I should more closely identify with. When applying to colleges, I didn't add U.C. Irvine to the list. U.C.I. University of Chinese Immigrants. I didn't want to go to school with too many Asians. Instead, I enrolled at Sweet Briar College, a small school located in rural Virginia 3,000 miles away from home. During my first year, I was one of only several Asians on campus. I ate Ramen noodles for breakfast when I didn't wake up in time to go to the dining hall, and the smell would penetrate into the hall. When my roommate wasn't in the room, I snacked on microwaveable rice bowls and packets of dry salted seaweed. I missed diversity. But at the same time, I just wanted to blend in. Once, while in an administrative office, a woman asked me if I was an international student. Although offended, I refrained from saying, "I'm American, thankyouverymuch." When the international banquet rolled around, several professors asked me if I had cooked anything for the event. Was I supposed to? Was it automatically assumed that as a minority student I wanted to represent my culture? Because I didn't. I'm in no way representative of all Koreans.

"How does it feel to be one of the few minorities on campus?" a high school counselor asked me as I was giving a tour. I told her it didn't bother me, not because I *had* to always describe the school in a positive light, but because it was the truth. But when she commented that a student at another school said she missed rice, a thought flashed into my mind - *Should I feel guilty for not feeling the same way?* Earlier, the woman approached me. She wasn't assigned my group number, but asked if she

could still join me. An Asian woman from California magnetized to someone of a similar background, but me burdened with the pressure to represent my race. Psychologists call this phenomenon “spotlight anxiety,” the awareness that you are different, but also the fear that other people will look to you as a representative of your whole race.

I didn’t even know enough about my own culture. Out of all the countries in the world, I decided to study abroad in South Korea the summer after my sophomore year, with the goal of improving my Korean language. I applied for an eleven-week program at Yonsei University in Seoul, first interning at the Korea National Tourism Organization for five weeks and then taking a couple classes at the university while staying at their International House. After thirteen hours on the plane, I landed in a different world, familiar yet strange. For the first five weeks, I stayed in my aunt’s two-bedroom apartment, where she and my older male cousin Sero resided. The place had no carpet, no beds, no couches, and no dining room table. Every evening I took out blankets and a pillow from a massive, black wardrobe and laid them out to form a bed; in the morning I folded everything neatly and piled them back in. The three of us ate our meals around the kitchen counter, not even sitting on chairs, but on sturdy containers my aunt had constructed that also functioned as stools. We watched television sitting cross-legged on a thick mattress. Alone, I would indulge in re-runs of “Friends” but would quickly change the channel if someone unexpectedly came home. Spoiled by the middle-class comforts of living in the United States, I had to adjust.

I also *had* to speak in Korean. My aunt didn’t know any English. There was no getting around that. All of a sudden the Korean vocabulary lodged deep inside my brain crept forward. But I still sounded like an elementary school kid, probably worse. My aunt often called me a *babo* or *mung-chung*, which literally translated into “idiot.” Sometimes I would understand what she was saying but didn’t know how to respond back in Korean. My aunt interpreted the silence as the inability to com-

prehend. I felt even more awkward talking to Sero Oppa (Korean girls typically referred to older males as “big brother”). He always told me to speak to him in either Korean or English, that he understood a little English. But the thought of speaking to him in English made me feel uncomfortable, inadequate, ashamed. I’d rather have kept quiet than make it blatant that I was a foreigner.

Afraid that I would get lost while commuting to my internship via subway, my aunt told Sero Oppa to take me there and make sure I could find my way there and then back home. After finding my way to the building, we walked back to the subway station, but before heading home, he told me to walk back to the building. This time, I would lead and he would follow, which was easy because it was only a few blocks away. However, returning home was a different story. I have never been good with directions. I lead the way from the subway station - Express Bus Terminal, located on the red line - to my aunt’s apartment, trying to figure out if I remembered the route. Whenever I hesitatingly stopped, Sero Oppa would look at me and ask “What?” This confused me even more. When I stopped in front of the door, confident that this was the correct place, he asked, “Are you sure this is it?” and started walking out. Bewildered, I followed him. For the longest time we just stood there, and he played dumb, asking “Where’s our home?”

Lost in a country that was not my own, I felt like an outsider. When I visited a Buddhist temple during my internship at Korea National Tourism Organizaiton, we learned how the monks ate their meals. We sat on square cushions on the hardwood floor. We unwrapped the cloths like Christmas presents and placed the four silver bowls in front of us - one to hold the rice, one to hold the vegetables, one to hold the soup, and one to hold the water we would later wash the other three bowls with. Everyone had to wait until everyone was served. With the clacking of a wooden stick, the monk indicated when we could start eating. We had to eat in silence, and we had to finish in fifteen minutes. But I was careless and took my time; I had always been a slow eater. When everyone else was ready to clean their bowls, I still

had a large amount of food left. I panicked. I couldn't just gobble everything up; the monk had already signaled that we should be done eating. Noticing my leftovers, the monk put me in the spotlight, and my eyes welled up. I couldn't stop crying. I felt like a failure. Embarrassed, the woman next to me compiled my leftover food into one bowl. She started cleaning the bowls for me, and told me everything was O.K., that I should stop crying. "She doesn't act as though she's from here," the monk commented. My co-workers informed her that I was from the States. The monk nodded as though that explained everything.

"She doesn't act as though she's from here." The monk would not be the only person to say that. At Yonsei University, I took a Korean language class - an exam placed me at beginners, level 3, not quite ready for intermediate. At the end of the session, we took a final exam consisting of two parts - a written one, focusing on Korean grammar and vocabulary, and an oral one, in which we had an interview with a teacher. She'd ask us a question, and we'd have to respond in Korean. After we finished, the teacher commented that I spoke well enough to be understood, but my pronunciation didn't sound like a native's.

But that was exactly it. I wasn't from there. While I was in Korea, though, I desperately wanted to fit in. Even though I avoided wearing shirts with English writing and even though I didn't speak much in public, Koreans were not fooled by my appearance. Once, when some friends and I were walking down the street, a girl dressed in white tried to get our attention. She was advertising a product, as a lot of Koreans do out on the streets, but we stared at her with blank expressions. As we continued walking, I overheard her say, "Oh, you foreigners!" We had been caught, our identities revealed.

Taxi drivers also sensed that we were foreigners and often took advantage of us. One time we were riding in a cab, a friend pointed to a building and asked if we knew what it was. Without thinking, we asked the driver in Korean, stumbling over our words. The driver looked surprised. "You don't know what that is?" he asked and proceeded to give us an explanation. As

he continued driving, we noticed familiar landmarks and became confused. Was he driving in a circle? Because we weren't sure, we didn't say anything. Sure enough, when we reached our destination, he overcharged us. How could we complain to him when we didn't know what to say? Besides, Koreans are supposed to respect their elders. After that incident, my group of friends and I strategized - next time we rode a taxi, the person sitting in front next to the driver had to be fairly fluent in Korean, and we would not say a word until we got out. Or better yet, we'd opt for the subway or bus.

I went to Korea to feel more comfortable speaking the language, but three months were not enough, especially since I clung to familiarity and surrounded myself with fellow Americans. I developed confidence in speaking Korean when I was with my aunt. When my parents visited Korea, they were surprised at how much I spoke it, compared to when I was back home. After I arrived home, however, things reverted to exactly how they were before I left. I tried speaking in Korean to my parents over the phone, but it now feels awkward and I find it easier to just use English. At church I still avoid Korean adults, afraid that they will ask me a question that will require more than a yes or no answer. My grandfather and I still lack any sort of intimacy or connection. When he comes to our house for dinner, he always sits at the head of the table, and I always escape to my room upstairs. We rarely talk. Similarly, I will spend an hour on the phone with my father, who has developed his English skills over the years, but talk to my mother for five minutes. She doesn't know enough English, and I don't know enough Korean. She talks to me in Korean, and I respond in English. If she doesn't seem to understand, I try to translate in Korean to the best of my ability. My father acts as a go-between. My mother writes me letters in Korean, forcing me to practice reading, and I go through every line trying to translate the hieroglyphics into some sort of meaning. I always feel guilty when I don't write her back, can't write her back in Korean. Language, the fundamental component that connects human beings together, is lost.

Although I'm not fluent in the language and I may not "act Korean," being Korean is still, and will always be, a part of who I am. Reflecting back, I appreciate that my parents instilled me with traditions and showed me that I was connected to a unique culture. I'm an American, but I'm also Korean. On the Internet, you can find lists titled "You Know You're Korean When...". You know you're Korean when your parents think church is a social event. Your parents have never kissed you. No matter how hard she tries, your mom will never pronounce the word "wood" correctly. You ask your parent's help on your math homework and two hours later, they're still lecturing you about how they knew it in fourth grade.

Being a first generation Korean, you don't have a culture of your own. Trapped between two cultures, you swing back and forth like a ping-pong ball, trying to figure out where you fit in. Sometimes you don't make it across the net, favoring one side more than the other. Sometimes you get thrown out of the boundaries, confused and not knowing to which side you belong. But in the end you accept yourself for who you are. A Korean-American.

Colleen Karaffa

She Never Smells Like Rose

She never smells like rose
colored rouge or must
that comes with aged clothing.
More like bread, she smells of wheat and pepper,
thyme and ripened summer tomatoes she's diced.

She stirs sweet onions
simmering in a pan,
and makes conversation of her hands:
they're swollen at the knuckles,
she tells me, and you can see the veins.
I say nothing back. I see
only that they've been molded
by the breaking of corn cobs,
chicken wings, garlic cloves,
celery stalks, loaves of Italian bread -
Broken like the seal of a love letter.

Samantha Heckert

Five Minutes

We are confronting death, Isabel and I. Abandoning our shoes and stockings behind what's left of Isabel's house, we float down the river, letting it pull us into the unknown. Toward that part of the river that spreads and opens like the mouth of the whale swallowing Jonah; whole and alive. Our journey cut short, we wash into a marshy patch and decide to let the sun set around us, to leave us in the dark with no way home.

"Do you think this is where they found him?" I turn my head from the golden clouds to Isabel's face. She looks peaceful.

"Shut up, Maggie." The April water tingles our toes and her fingers freeze around mine. She closes her eyes and confronts death alone.

Three months ago, Jack Kurland, a sophomore at the high school, drowned in the river that winds its way through our neighborhoods; that streams through our backyards connecting us to one another. There was a lot of hushed talk among the adults after that, like no one wanted to bring it up. The day Jack's body was found bloated and stiff in the water, my own mother only thought to mention his drinking habits and brought up the time he crashed his father's BMW into the lamppost in front of the library. Though he was two years older than us and we never really knew him, Isabel took it personally and became obsessed with his death. The bitter fights between her parents had recently gotten worse and she spent a lot of time at my house, sleeping over most nights. Her older brother, Christian, disappeared to his own friends, one of whom was Jack.

"He had wallpaper in his room, with airplanes. Remember I wanted to know what color walls he had? It's so weird, I still have my wallpaper up from when I was little too." She announced each minute discovery about Jack in the afternoons on our way home from school. She found out every

detail of Jack's life, starting with the wallpaper and musical tastes, marveling at how similar they were. She was the one who told me what my parents wouldn't; that the accident happened on New Year's Eve. Jack and some other kids, including Christian, were drunk and walking on the railing of the bridge that crossed the wide part of the river; taking turns on the tightrope that leads from one part of town to the other.

She questioned Christian about it, wanting to know what Jack's body sounded like when it hit the water; if he screamed as he fell. Her eyes glazed over and she waited with her mouth parted, like she was waiting for a kiss.

"Just shut the fuck up about it, Iz." He slammed his books down on the table, spilling soda from our glasses, and walked away. Isabel then looked at me and told me that he was probably dead after about five minutes in the water; it was that cold.

"That's all it takes – five minutes." She snapped her fingers with a confidence that could stop time.

Lying in the river, I can no longer feel anything below my knees and my ears ache and burn from being underwater for so long. I look over at Isabel; I'm ready to go. Her eyes are still closed and the thick, black eyeliner that she's been wearing recently is running down her face like black tears and the bright, pink scrapes on her arms are raised and irritated under the water.

"He cheated on her, that douche bag." Isabel took a puff of the stolen cigarette she was smoking on the roof of her house. Her father had moved out a week earlier and her mother began to drink all day, collapsing on her bed by mid-afternoon. From where we sat we could hear her mother crying from the open window in the master bedroom. When we were inside the house we could only hear muffled moans and sobs. But outside we could hear the rising cries and choking breaths as clearly as my own fingernails scraping at the shingles.

"Do you really want to go to that party next weekend?" I examined my nails, torn and jagged from the roof. Isabel threw her cigarette into the gutter.

“Oh, we’re going.” She stood up and lifted herself through the window to her room. I watched the gutter until her still lit cigarette eventually gave up and died; its thin trail of smoke suspended in the air.

We didn’t need to sneak out of Isabel’s house; we walked out the front door. Her mother slept diagonally across the bed, clothes still on; in the same position she was in earlier that night. The party was in someone’s garage apartment, and wasn’t really even a party; their parents were home and we had to walk around the house to get to the stairs. Everyone was sitting on couches and the floor in the dark, drinking beer; trying to get drunk quietly. Stacy and Beth, the girls who told Isabel about the party, sat on one of the couches playing drinking games with three high school boys.

“Hi girls,” Isabel said as quietly as possible and sat on the couch next to Stacy. I perched on the arm and watched as Isabel joined in the game, which involved flipping a card and chugging beer. Beth handed me a dented beer can. The first sip was warm, clogging my throat with foam, tongue suctioned to the roof of my mouth; I exhaled the metallic air and put the can down.

The game was boring, I couldn’t chug the warm beer so I sat on the couch and watched while everyone got drunk. Isabel had gone to the bathroom and left me with Stacy and Beth. Both girls sat leaning forward on the couch to give the boys the best possible view of their push-up bra cleavage. No one talked to me and I tried not to look bored as I sat in the space Isabel had abandoned on the couch ten minutes earlier. Christian noticed me immediately when he walked through the door of the apartment.

“What the fuck are you doing here?” I was surprised to see him, I looked around the room and recognized a few boys as Christian’s friends.

“Um...” I looked at my nails, which I hadn’t cut or filed, they were long and uneven.

“Where’s Isabel?” He demanded as Isabel walked back from bathroom, tipsy from chugging beer, a short blonde guy behind her.

Isabel didn't put up a fight when Christian demanded he take us home, she took her time saying goodbye to everyone, kissing the blonde guy on the lips before I dragged her out the door.

"Those are my fucking friends, you bitch." Christian slammed our door and ran back upstairs to claim his beer.

"That was Connor Tracey," Isabel leaned back and breathed beer into my face. "Jack's girlfriend cheated on him with that guy." She slumped into the front seat and put on her seatbelt.

We arrived home that night to find our small street crowded with police cars, an ambulance, and fire trucks all flashing their lights. It made the whole street look like a disco. My parents were outside along with the rest of the neighborhood, witnessing the second most exciting thing to happen in our area that winter. Later they would warn, in hushed voices, that bad things always come in threes.

Isabel and Christian's house was smoldering, smoke and ash in the air. Later I would find small pieces of wood from their house in my backyard. Their mother was swaying back and forth in the front yard, obviously still drunk, holding their cat, Trinket. She grabbed Christian when she saw him and held on to the sleeve of his jacket.

"It's your father, it's your father." She repeated, gripping his jacket and the cat. A policeman went up to Christian and explained that it was an electrical fire. I walked from their yard and saw Isabel standing in the street. Her arms hung at her sides and she stared at her house, shivering in her skirt and heels; there was nothing left where her room used to be, just water dripping from burnt wood.

"Izzy, we'll sleep at my house tonight." I reached for her hand. Her fingertips felt frozen and hard. She jerked her hand from me violently.

"Go the fuck home, Maggie."

The sky is turning purple; I can still make out the huge fir tree of Isabel's backyard. It looms in the distance, a reminder that if I don't go home my mother will kill me.

“Iz,” I whisper. She looks at me through the side of one eye; her lips have turned blue. “Isabel, I have to go home.” She doesn’t say anything, but won’t let go of my hand as I start to move away from her; gripping my fingers and glaring at me through black rimmed eyes. She didn’t see me sitting alone today at lunch, or the days before that. She barely returned my phone calls when she moved. It’s okay I can go, Stacy and Beth are her friends now.

I swim up the river to Isabel’s fir tree and slosh home without bothering to find my shoes. I half-expect Isabel to catch up with me eventually, she’ll sleep over tonight when she does.

Earlier that afternoon, Isabel and I trudged through the remains of her house, through the black ashes that swallowed her childhood. Resembling a dollhouse, just the front and roof of the house had burned entirely, leaving the back sections of the house still relatively intact, though blackened. We looked up at the empty space that was her room and saw the sky. She walked around, pointing at clumps of things and trying to identify them, going so far as to say that what was clearly a charred lamp was the body of her cat, Trinket, that her mother had saved the night it burned down.

Isabel had purposefully missed her bus after school. She ignored Stacy and Beth because she wanted to walk home with me like we used to.

“I really wanna look at my old house. Please Mags,” her blue eyes were bloodshot and darkened with eyeliner. Stacy and Beth hated me, and now Isabel did too. She started walking down the street and I didn’t say anything, but followed.

Isabel’s mother moved what was left of their family across the bridge to the other side of town. She had to ride the bus with Stacy and Beth, that was how they became friends. She went to parties that I couldn’t go to and called me once to say that she had met Jack’s older brother and his ex-girlfriend, the one who cheated on him with Connor, did I remember? After she called, I tried to sit with Stacy, Beth, and Isabel the next day at lunch.

“Nice shoes.” Beth remarked as I sat down next to her. I had compared my mary-janes with their Doc Martins while they snorted and rolled their eyes. I glanced at Isabel; she was doing it too.

After poking around the ashes of her house and petting the “remains” of her cat, Isabel went straight for the river at the end of her backyard, taking off her shoes and stockings as she walked. She never looked back at me but I followed her, taking off my shoes and knee socks and throwing them in the bushes, letting them hang there like Christmas ornaments. Isabel was already climbing into the water when I got there.

“Do you ever wonder what it felt like?” She wiped one hand across her red mouth, smearing lipstick. She looked like a hungry animal. She was talking about Jack Kurland. She immersed herself in the water and I followed. We paddled downstream until we got to a current strong enough to carry us.

“Okay, listen. No talking, keep your eyes closed, and we can’t be separated.” She grabbed my hand, her blue, painted fingernails digging into my skin.

April nights can get very cold here; a cool day can drop to freezing by nighttime. A girl lying in a river could freeze to death in five minutes – that’s all it would take. A fisher found Isabel’s body, bloated and stiff, under the bridge early that morning. Her bare legs were blue and one hand was frozen like a claw, as if she had been holding onto something she didn’t want to let go of.

Cara Cherry

Untitled



Brandon Agnew

Letter to My Future Lover

There are several things you should know:
late at night I begin to melt -- drip,
dripping into a fury of well oiled emotions.
It is then that I should be held,
have hands placed solvently upon back,
neck, side of jaw held still, comforted.

There are no guarantees with me;
no clearly defined actions of giving--
or is it that I simply wait to be given.
And it is important, take a deep breath,
for I demand attention, a purely selfish act.

There are changes you need to understand,
I no longer want just body, the flesh,
curve of hip or slow arch of arm,
which once made me, sending me bending,
bowing backward in exotic tantrums.

There are times you will have to be patient,
wait quietly while I take, take, take, and you,
running fingertips through my hair, must be.

What I can say,
will promise silently,
is that I will be yours.
And I will be.

Jadrienne Brown

Graveyard



Julia Patt

Distance

the brittle bark husk
is cracked in four now.

its insides were fired to boiling
in a lightning strike
or else--
the heart rot,
gummed to sawdust
by termites.

the tender tree meat
of a century and some
is recalled solely
in humus layers,
fallen leaves.

yet still it grows
flowering
with all the green
of the woods

or most
in the sapling
sprung from its fallen
helicopter seeds--
new leafing teething,
not a meter hence.

childern rarely do
sprout far.

Angelica Guarino

Alive Again

Like Christmas in July, it's Summer in November
But our version is real and non-commercial.

75 degrees and lightning flashes purple
Strobe lights and vibrations like bass
Our own rained out concert.

Walking home at midnight through rain
Should be cold and pitiful.
Surprise, I've found nirvana instead
A world breathing quietly around me
Pulling me back to life.

Gently kissing the bits of nose and cheek
My hood has abandoned,
Raindrops slip off canopy-leaves
Rising minutes later as mist and
Meeting in the middle.

A spring shower, set in autumn
By acorns popping under my flip-flops.
Glowing of amber leaves above me
Their carpet graces the shiny black asphalt
The world glows orange again.

A delicious ambiguity
Lit by giant iron candlesticks:
Lampposts flicker with gentle halos
The huge collected raindrops
As their dripping wax.

Breathing deep, halfway down the hill
Loving the clean smell of nothingness
As I break writer's block I laugh
And say "I love you"
To everyone hovering, watching me.

Karliana Sakas

Closed



Coming Back

Autumn again and I've moved into a dorm room for the final time, anxious to have the year over with, to be rid of picnic forks for cutlery, cups for flower vases, and milk crates for shelves that make this kind of temporary home work. After spending a year at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, I've come to back to things that once familiar, now seem foreign: screened-in windows, hot and cold water coming out of the same faucet, and breakfast muffins instead of scones. In the morning, I'll rummage through my drawers looking for something to wear as anyone does. My eye will hinge on a sweater I'd worn in Scotland, a T-Shirt from my first year of college, a jacket I've had since the tenth grade. Occasionally, I'll reach quickly for something else, an item with no memories.

This past summer, I took some time to put one of those frames together that's got places cut out for multiple photos. Sometimes I'll just look at the wood and think about what's there.

One of Tommy's best friends gave me that frame, the boy who used to sit with me behind the ex-Wal-Mart building. That was six years ago. He and I used listen to The Promise Ring playing from his car, windows left down, after school. We'd perch outside on the concrete loading deck; he'd smoke cigarettes from the pack hidden in the electrical box as I watched the autumn clouds transform on the late September breeze. I like to think the frame was given to me for moments like those, the ones that become a little less tangible, and appear a little less often with each passing year. Without that frame in my room to remind me, I might forget.

As if I were fitting together a puzzle, I had glued the photos from before and after my travels into that frame. Though from different times and places, the photos manage to look as if they couldn't be placed any other way. Stuck next to the Scottish countryside is a street in downtown Staunton, Virginia. The

fluttering green awnings on the buildings are so familiar that I don't think I noticed them until now. In this picture, the steeple of the courthouse reaches above the buildings, pointing to some Scottish friends in the picture above. Two trendy Scottish girls with razored, dark hair and enormous chandelier earrings, pale-skinned, and half-grinning sit with hands reaching for their vodka mixers; beside them is the next picture of me. I've got an uncharacteristic, confident smile on my face at a pub with my friend Russell, from Edinburgh. He's smiling like he's half-sad, half-content with his arm across my shoulder. And above this is my friend Sarah from York, England, hugging me like a sister I missed while far away. Finally, next to her, is the photograph of Tommy. He's the oldest brother in my family's line-up, which goes something like this: Chris is the youngest, then up from him is Clair, Lucy, Me, Pete, and finally Tommy at the top.

I took this shot. It's of Tommy taking a picture of rooftops against the sky in September. The clouds are floating high, maybe even higher than the paths of airplanes.

It's a full-body shot that I snatched from behind. I didn't tell him to pose; I just took it like I snatch chocolates to enjoy in the solitude of my own room. His body is shrunk on the page to the size of the army men we used to bury Mom's garden. You can't really see his face, just the sweep of his left cheek and a squinted eye up to a camera. His blonde hair, bleached white from weeks at the beach, flicks up at his ears. He stands at the street-side edge of a parking space in line with the white cross painted on the asphalt. His shadow slants away from him and creeps onto the sidewalk.

Even now, I don't see Tommy much. I can go a whole day without giving him a thought, and then, when I break for a coffee or a stroll around campus - Tommy winning a bubblegum chewing contest, skateboarding in the Downtown Inn parking lot, listening to Pearl Jam down Route 275, or surfing on the Outer Banks - will show up in my mind like an unexpected visit from an old friend. Pinpricks spread across my face, my hand moves to my forehead, sometimes my heart, and I think:

you have forgotten yourself. Then I am overcome with an inconsolable loneliness.

Tommy, having graduated from college a few months ago, lives a transient lifestyle on Hatteras Island, where he surfs daily for months at a time. He's been spending his summers there since he was a senior in high school; he goes down, works the restaurants bar tending and bussing and waiting tables – anything to stay near the ocean. There is solace for him in the exhilaration of waves, of the ground below becoming fluid; the water lifting him like wind lifts autumn leaves from their branches. The push and pull of the water is like things he's told me about buying a house at the beach, but also wishing he could find a job in Staunton. Maybe he'll go to California or to Costa Rica again. Before he graduated and before I ever left to study abroad, if he wasn't visiting on Hatteras, he'd be at George Mason University finishing his undergraduate studies, a disappointing six-year undertaking. Sometimes he'd come to Staunton or go to the beach when he felt the city swallowing him and school clutching him for money and time.

Before I went abroad, he was working on his final art project that required pictures of Staunton, which he would compile in a book. This book was the culmination of his college studies, and the final test before his delayed release into the working world. He's never really thought about work much though. I used to wonder what he thought about if he didn't think about the future. He went to college because Dad didn't and said he had to. He started at Virginia Tech because Dad said he'd better. Said it was time to go. Dad was excited, but Tommy was quiet. Later Tommy ended up transferring to GMU with Peter, who was in his second year there. He couldn't choose a major; finally he picked something with art, which he doesn't intend to use. Tommy's always leaving to go to the beach, or to go to art museums in New York, or to visit California. None of us resented his leaving. We didn't really talk about it with each other, but we all competed to greet him first when he came home.

Now at my desk, I feel as if I've landed here rather than as if I'd actually made a conscious choice to move back in. I'm lucky though, because home for me isn't far away. Last year, with one week left before I would board an airplane for the first time, the distance between my family and I had already begun to grow. I shut my eyes tight when I hugged people, and I told Dad to pour me a little bit extra of his homemade wine at dinner. At meals, I couldn't say much, just leaned back hard against my chair and watched everyone eating, laughing with their mouths full, and reaching far across the table for salt or bread or whatever.

Tommy had asked me to come along while he took photos of Staunton for his book. So he strode around town and I trailed behind him. A tranquil tension filled the space between our pacing, like that on the ground above a fault line before the earthquake. Time was like a reaper coming to pluck me from home at a moment that would come too soon, a moment of uprooting I could only vaguely understand. Tommy and I walked through shaded alleyways, cool and damp like caves, under high clouds looked like raw cotton, and under pigeons flying from the courthouse roof to the jail building and back again in graceful rhythm. Faces of buildings with windows like open eyes, glossy and brilliant, inviting side streets with rickety pipes climbing the crumbled brick rose on either side of us as we walked. Paint glistened on houses the colors of summer fruits – pineapple, peach, lime, watermelon – where ladies live who have donated to the old-fashioned trolleys carting tourists around town, their names in gold paint on the sides of the cars: Lady Rebecca, Lady Libby, Lady Elizabeth. Chipped paint the colors of overripe plum, bruised red apple, and boiled spinach that cover the houses of Ryan's buffet employees and the members of the Cracker Barrel team, made these places look worn and sleepy with shades drawn. Tommy and I paused to photograph Coffee on the Corner where I sat once, journaling for six straight hours on the teal and gold embroidered couch. Then he shot pictures of Mary Baldwin College whose columned buildings with yellowing paint loom

above Staunton residents who have lived in their shadow, but have never walked across the fresh-mowed grass. We walked past the Blackfriars Playhouse, the world's only reproduction of its original, where curly haired gents with glasses mill about dressed in black shirts, ties, trousers, and flashy jet shoes. We passed the old library, now converted into Grace Christian School, and the rail road tracks that lead to the farmhouse where I grew up. We stopped in front of the Mill Street Grill where a woman can wear her pearls and satin, and a man can sport a three-piece suit; then in front of Byers Street Housewares, which was once a sewing factory where women spent hours hunched over their machines, slowly stitching fabrics together. Next came the Stonewall Jackson Hotel that housed released patients from Western State mental hospital; but it's been remodeled and now houses rich tourists. Turning a corner, we headed towards Blue Mountain Coffees where I worked the opening shift that summer brewing coffee. Behind the cafe, the bridge over the train tracks stood solid as images froze on the film in the camera. As an artist steps back from his painting, a carpenter from his house, a host from a table prepared for company, so I stepped back and viewed Staunton that day. Walking around was like an occasion where afterwards you go out for ice cream sundaes and sodas in frosted mugs to celebrate.

As I hold my picture frame in my hand, I notice that Tommy's picture looks as if he posed for it. But I had arbitrarily pointed my disposable camera, caught Tommy in the scope of the lens, aimed, and took the shot of him standing there all on a whim. That moment, on paper now trapped in dots of ink, sits in the frame on my desk. When people comment on it sometimes saying, "that's an interesting shot," I want to take it out of the frame and hide it. Instead, I begin explaining when, where, how it was taken. As soon as I start, people's eyes trail about the room, or to the photo below it, or worse, to the floor. A painful inadequacy overtakes me as I cut the story short and agree that, "yes, it's interesting." The picture becomes a chocolate truffle

without the filling. Something is missing. That comfort when you're with someone who understands you well, that frightening realization when you know you must soon leave, that the experiences in the near future will estrange you from the ones you love – all this and more was lost in the ink, in the houses and bodies shrunken in dimension. Sometimes I question if it is a failing in myself that once I own a picture I admire, I keep it safe and protected; I put it in a frame or my special hat box with the gold detailing on the lid. I wish I had the strength to never take the picture in the first place; I wish I wasn't compelled to hold on to it for fear of losing something greater. The thought of losing it can trap a quick breath in my lungs. I don't trust myself to hold secure this vision of my brother with a camera to his face documenting the arrangement of the buildings of Staunton, Virginia 24401.

I wonder if I'm better off without the photos; if I'm better off shutting the drawer on all my sweaters and shirts worn in various places to just let them be shirts, better off forgetting that I was given that picture frame after a long drive and a smoke with my high school boyfriend, better off forgetting that the Trolleys are named after people who found a way to stamp their name in our town. I wish I trusted enough to let the memories manifest in some unconscious way, always existing, never pulling me down or elating me, but rising through me, remaining oblivious.

In the hour or so Tommy spent stealing shots of buildings we heard the rush of an occasional pick up truck, the tap of my maryjanes and the scuff of Tommy's etnies along the pavement. Sparrows searched the ground next to Blue Mountain Coffees. Their bodies flitted from the crooked branches of rosebud trees against the curb, to the brick walkway in front of the shops, and back again. They skidded across the ground like pebbles skipped on a lake, bouncing over uneven bricks pushed up by tree roots. The roots, undoing the careful work of masons, made the walkway seem like an old piece of furniture, nicked, stained, gashed, endearing for its wounds. The corners of the popped

bricks pressed upon the soles of my shoes. My feet have met the surface of those bricks an uncountable number of times without ever feeling their jutting corners and broken edges. I trailed behind Tommy through the corridor made from walls of trees to the left and shops to the right, my head down, with that eerie feeling of something coming, something that made me feel those tree roots as if it were my last chance. With Tommy going in front of me, as he always has being the oldest, I thought that he must have felt some of this before leaving home for the first time. Maybe all of his silence was the silence of being overwhelmed that I felt washing over me then, just before leaving the spaces of home.

Those roots put a slow, steady pressure on the bricks until they break. That same pressure, just before something lets go its firm hold is like the Scottish dancing I experienced abroad. I was far from Tommy then, but I got a sense of what it must have been like for him to go away. At those dances, just before my partner released during Strip-the-Willow, I'd be balanced against him, hands clasped, weight thrown back, spinning until the centripetal force became too strong. The capable hands of a Scotsman were entwined in my own, the hands of someone I knew only as a kilt-wearing, twenty-one year old with two pints of Guinness and a shot of hot whiskey in his belly. Those hands may have planted cabbages in the backyard, gripped motorcycle handles on the highway, spread a sleeping bag in an Amsterdam hostel, rested on the brow of a dying relative, or laced themselves in the spiky mane of a pony galloping along the North Sea. Lines and scars in his hand held the touch of places and things gripping my own hands tight and pulling, pulling fast against me, circling with the pace of the music. And I grasped these hands that were in Amsterdam, on the motorcycle, on the ambulance, in the horse's mane, with my own that have been in Staunton, on Trolleys, on Espresso machines, on the steel of train tracks. I began to spin until the music issued the beat when we both let the motion break our desperate grasp and swing us down the long line of other hands, waiting to twirl me once around and pass me on to the

next waiting dancer. When finally I reached the end of the line and the music stopped, I sat panting, my hands burning from that first spin when I held on as if it were my last chance to ever grip those capable hands again.

While dancing, I counted aloud the strokes of the fiddle along with my partner as my hair reached out behind me, picking up momentum. I ran through my mind which direction to go and whose arm to lock when I let go on that precise strike of bow and string. When our hands broke free I did not envision any of the life experiences of my partner or of my own. With the blind, weightless feeling of a surfer in a wave, the incredible movement freed me, and there was nothing else but faith in motion. Now when I see someone drinking a pint of Guinness at a bar, or I look at the picture of my brother on my desk, or I smell a fresh September breeze, my breath draws short, and I blink as if dizzy. I feel those words rising again, *you have forgotten yourself*. And when looking at all my pictures that preserve merely the image of these faces, I can't help feeling both liberated and estranged.

When I had first arrived in Scotland, I kicked my feet up high walking down Queen's Gardens, my street. The sun was hidden by heavy clouds outlined in bright light. As the wind picked up my scarf and sent it dancing around my face into the air, it was as though my whole body felt lighter, as if a wave were going to lift me from the sidewalk. What a joy it was to know nothing and no one in that place! If I tripped on the cobblestones no one would recognize me; if I smoked cigarettes outside the library, or if I skipped a class to watch the storm roll in over the sea no one would say anything. And then I started emailing Tommy, the talking seemed easier when we were both away. We were more in the same place then than we were at home, that place where celebration clashes with lament, that place where you're free from everyone and everything, but you're alone.

Last May, after all the Scottish dancing was over and I had turned a year older, I stood in the airport waiting for my

delayed baggage; my hair oily from the plane ride, pinned up in the front Euro style; my empire waist bohemian top, flowers climbing up from the bottom; my jeans loosened from the past four days I'd been traipsing around Paris. Pensive and observant, I sat on the floor while people stirred, anxious about their luggage. A boy with a broken foot, his crutches jammed under his arms, stood in front of me and I had the strong urge to approach him and tell him I'd broken my foot two years ago. I wanted to offer something of my experience to him, to place my hand over his like we do in church at the peace-be-with-you. It's not really the words that mean anything then because everybody says them; it's the hand touching hand that's the thing. You can feel then, if someone means it. But then my baggage came through the shoot, and I was sharply distracted from the boy with the crutches to my own situation. I paused a moment before retrieving it with the same hesitation I have when coming to the end of a great novel. In the customs line I imagined my family eager to see me across the barrier. The thought stopped me for a moment in the fear that I could convey nothing of Scottish dancing, of scones and tea, of fields of gorse and heather, of craggy mountains and cliffs of sea gulls. I felt these things rise to my throat and become stuck. And then I didn't know which direction to move.

All of these coming backs – from Scotland to home, home to college – are like tumbling through waves. First the water builds, it gathers, it prepares for the fall. It rises high. As it surges forward the water moves with a power so strong that anything in it cannot stop or find an anchor. You get built up, you get brought to the top of the crest the same way a deep breath in your chest raises you; you get pushed and tossed, sometimes gently, other times brutally. You get thrown into things and what a miracle it is that we are able to hold on to the things we do; to become attached to the people we are privileged to know; it could've been something else, someone else swirling around in the water beside me, but it wasn't. It was the boy on the crutches, it was the drunken Scot, it was Tommy. The

greatest difference between Tommy and I is that I like being washed ashore, I like finding people and holding on to them; for him it's easier to stay groundless. In the airport, I could understand him wanting to run, to turn, to get back on the plane and not see the family just yet. I could give in to a desire to let them exist somewhere in the water, close by but not able to touch me. And I was at that place again before the whirlwind. I had that tightness in my chest and that shaky feeling in my feet as I slid over the cold tiles in slow deliberation. Still in line, I waited in the airport, my weight braced, poised, balanced against my suitcases.

Brandon Agnew

Thoughts on Impending Death

I.

There is no way to hide,
his rippling of wrist,
the slow coo of cough
slipping through the throat.

II.

Death sits near,
watching patiently,
rubbing palm against
crest of thumb,
bend of breaking nail.

III.

He is all that is left of a name,
Ayers, his father, lost at five,
Now seemingly standing again
A single last queasy stance.

IV.

Son,
veteran,
husband,
father,
grandfather
 of three,
grandfather of me,
a man.

V.

When the time comes,
the day ends silently,
swooping over hillside,
valley, field, and home.

Will it all seem real?

Death once again seeking audience and compassion.

Or will it ebb so slightly
that it is almost invisible?

VI.

Who am I,
to make a man,
hold, keep holding,
till the grip loosens
slips, dips into now?

VII.

With him, now,
there are only
moments left,
tinges of day -
light and moon -
shine, whiskey
of breath, curdle
of throated laugh,
quivered smile.

Angelica Guarino

It All Goes So Quickly



“What do you want for breakfast, Brinly?” I asked my four-year-old as we waited in the McDonald’s drive-thru line. I turned the handle to roll down the window of our ancient pick-up truck; we could hear the ocean across the road, swaying against the sand on the beach. She looked at me thoughtfully, her blue-green eyes like miniature globes. “Jelly biscuit,” she finally decided, chewing on her thumb. I inched up to the speaker and placed the order: a biscuit and a carton of milk for her, and a biscuit for me. “That’ll be \$3.98. Please drive around,” a tired-sounding voice informed me through an abundance of static. I closed my eyes and let my shoulders fall in resignation; that was almost everything I had stashed in the glove compartment. Brinly watched me silently as I tried to maneuver to the drive-thru window one-handed, my jaw-length blonde hair falling in my face. With the other hand, I reached across her and felt around for the bills, so old they were nearly as soft as the blanket she’d had as a baby. I finally found all five and forced myself to give my daughter a weak smile.

I tried to unwrinkle the money before handing it to the teenaged girl who was sticking her head out of the building. “Do you want the change?” she asked, bored.

“Yes, please.” It embarrassed me to need those two cents. She broke open a roll of coins on the edge of the money drawer and handed me two of the pennies that fell out. “Could we have some jelly with that, please?” I requested. She turned and reached behind her, carelessly grabbing some packets of jelly and stuffing them into our bag before she handed the whole thing past the two windows to me. “Thank you,” I said.

“Here,” I dropped the warm bag into Brinly’s tiny lap. I pulled into a nearby parking space and turned off the truck so I could help her fix her food. Opening a package of strawberry jelly, I spread it on the hot, buttery biscuit.

“Mommy, can I sit in the back?” Brinly asked,

unbuckling her seatbelt. "Sure, sweetie," I told her, unlocking the passenger side door with my pinkie finger. The rest of my hand was occupied with the bag of food. She jumped onto the ground, clutching her breakfast, and walked to the bed of the truck. Awkwardly, she clambered onto the tailgate, nearly dropping her food in the process. I watched Brinly in the rearview mirror as I gathered my breakfast and her milk carton. I got out and joined my daughter in the bed of the truck. The air smelled of seaweed and salt, as only ocean air can. Brinly was watching the gulls that were loitering above the parking lot, awaiting crumbs and other scraps. She swung her short legs and reached for my hand. Her petite fingers pressed into my parched hand as if she were reading Braille on my palm.

"Can I feed that one?" She pointed to a grungy-white bird that was standing on the pavement. Its right wing looked damaged. "He has a boo-boo, and he can't fly," she explained.

"This is *your* breakfast, Brinly," I reminded her.

"I know, Mommy, but I'm gonna help him. He's hungry. I'll only give him a little bit."

"All right, sweetie, but just a few bites," I relented.

She nodded, pulled her hand out of mine, and stood up. "I can throw good this way," she explained. She broke off a piece of her biscuit and tossed it to the ground near the gull. The bird limped a few steps, its head bobbing, and tore viciously at the crumb.

Brinly and her bird repeated the exercise several times. Her angel hair blew around her face. It was thinner and longer than mine, but just as straight. She used one hand to brush it away, getting a piece of biscuit caught in strands that were the same freshly-buttered color as her breakfast.

She sat back down on the tailgate and wiggled her body until the toes of her sneakers barely touched the pavement below. Then, biscuit still in hand, she slid off the truck to stand on the ground. I watched her, my beautiful first child, and tried to stop the tears that were threatening to fill my eyes. I didn't want to cry in front of her. I held my head up, staring at the famous Golden Arches above the perpetually-busy Front Beach Road.

“Mommy,” she was hesitant. She took a step toward the truck and put her hand on my knee. Through my jeans, she traced the circle of my kneecap. Using my knee as a handhold, she pulled herself back into the truck bed. “Mommy, I miss Cassie.”

I swallowed, trying to remain emotionless. “I know, Brinly,” I told her, falsely calm. “I miss Cassie, too.” I hugged my four-year-old, maybe a little too tightly, and concentrated on not thinking about Cassie.

Cassie was my other daughter. She’d been born about three months ago. Brinly was thrilled to have a little sister. She was always wanting to hold Cassie, to feed Cassie, to rock Cassie to sleep. She even asked to change Cassie’s diaper once, before she realized what was in the diaper.

At two-and-a-half months old, though, Cassie suddenly left us, and I had to introduce my Brinly to the concept of death. It was SIDS that took my baby daughter, which basically means the doctors couldn’t tell us why she’d died.

So, for two weeks, I’d stayed in the house. I didn’t smile or laugh, but I didn’t cry, either. I was strong; I had to be, for Brinly. I forced myself to focus on my remaining daughter. I wouldn’t allow myself to think about Cassie. I cleaned the house like I had obsessive-compulsive disorder, dusting three times a day and constantly washing the dishes or the laundry.

This morning, though, Brinly had come into the kitchen, where I was cleaning the stove, and asked to go to McDonald’s. It seemed like it had been years since I’d been outside, but I knew Brinly was tired of being secluded from the world. So, like an old man trying to make a decent car out of mismatched, prehistoric parts, I’d gathered the pieces of myself. I’d found my purse and gotten us both into the truck. With a flawless appearance of normality, I drove to the restaurant and ordered our food. So, there I was, sitting in the parking lot of every soccer mom’s favorite fast food place. I tried to swallow the biscuit that was dry despite the two packages of jelly I’d smeared onto it with artistic precision. Weary of the effort it took to chew,

I put the half-eaten breakfast back on the greasy paper which had cradled it like a mother. Like a mother? Oh, God. I was torturing myself.

“Let’s go to the beach,” Brinly suggested, looking at me. Maybe she knew I needed a break from the too-cheerful, red and yellow McDonald’s decor. Maybe she just wanted to collect fragments of seashells, gripping the potato-chip ridges in her damp fists.

Silently, I agreed. I dropped off the end of the truck and helped Brinly jump to the ground. I walked back to the front of the truck to lock the doors, and Brinly followed me, placing her biscuit leftovers on the driver’s side seat before I closed the door.

“Hold my hand,” I reminded her. Again, her slender fingers wrapped around mine. We walked to the edge of the parking lot and waited for the traffic to thin. There was no cross-walk here, so we just had to wait for a break between cars. Finally, a van appeared in the distance, traveling slowly enough to allow us to cross the street. “Let’s go!” I told her. We jogged across the pavement, slowing down when it disappeared into sand. The white sand squeaked beneath our shoes as we descended the hill.

“Do you want to find some shells?” I asked Brinly.

“Let’s just walk,” she said.

“Okay,” I consented, happy to be doing something that required very little effort. We turned to the right and began walking, just far enough away from the water that our shoes wouldn’t get wet. Our hair soon grew tangled and salty from the ocean breeze, making me wish I’d brought a few hair ties. We walked several yards, admiring the water’s beautiful color and the medium-sized waves. We watched the tourists spreading towels and setting up umbrellas for a day of swimming and tanning. We noticed the profusion of butterfly shells at the edge of the water.

Brinly stopped and bent down to inspect one. “Look, Mommy,” she said, pulling me down to join her as she crouched on the beach. She fingered the two oblong halves and looked at me. “It’s pink and purple, just like the nursery. Cassie would like it.”

I stared at that shell, overcome with grief, and finally cried. I wept and wept for my youngest daughter. I wept because she would never take her first step. I wept because she would never learn to ride a bicycle. I wept because Brinly would not have Cassie with whom she could share clothes and make-up and wisdom. I wrapped my arms around my knees and didn't care that the tears had won. I was oblivious to the sun-bathers and dog-walkers around us. I only needed the comfort of my own tears.

The word "sob" is derived from an ancient word, which means "to draw breath." So, I did. I cleansed myself of all my pain, anger, and sorrow, releasing them with my tears. I gulped in breaths of hope and healing. I revitalized myself with the seaside air and discovered relief.

Brinly put her tiny arms around my shoulders, consoling me in her wonderful, four-year-old way. I looked up into her face and returned her hug. She bent down and kissed the base of my throat where the tears had been pooling. "I love you, Mommy," she whispered.

"I love you, too, Brinly," I assured her, giving her a genuine, if wet, smile this time. I wiped my face with the back of my hand, smearing the tears across my cheeks, and took another deep breath. "Are you ready to finish our walk?"

"Yeah," she nodded. I picked up the shell, getting sand under my fingernails as I did so. I hugged Brinly again and stood up.

"Look, Mommy," she said excitedly, pointing a few steps in front of us. "It's my bird!" There it was, playing in the spray from the waves. It had the same torn wing and walked with the same noticeable limp. I couldn't figure out how it had gotten across the road.

With the shell in my hand, we began walking again. As we neared that seagull, he ran awkwardly for three or four steps. Then, as if he'd been miraculously healed, he took off, flying over the water with the rhythm and grace of the tide.

Karliana Sakas

Horse Park



Closing

The barn stands tall overlooking its grassy pastures lined with faded wooden fences. A few thoroughbreds and warmbloods graze quietly. The gravel road curves around leading into the stable yard and the portico-like entrance into the Bailey Room. The solid, symmetrical, unifying, and aesthetically pleasing architecture of the barn echoes the principles a rider hopes to achieve on the back of a horse.

Red and orange maple leaves slowly drift toward the ground, until a short burst of cold wind carries them up again. A mare, led by one of the grooms, stares intently at the leaves whipping around her hooves. She lowers her head, flares her nostrils and produces a loud snort, as if in protest of the fall weather. The groom pulls on the lead, urging her forward and, once again, her hooves crunch the gravel.

In the barn, the classic stable scents, saddle soap and hay, stir gently through the aisle, propelled by the fans spinning overhead. A couple of horses stand cross tied as their riders or grooms pick hooves, brush coats and throw saddles on backs. Each horse responds differently to each rider's action. One horse, Vinnie, anxiously paws the ground while his handler tries for the third time to wrap his leg. Oakie appears to have fallen asleep with his head drooping, ears relaxed and eyes half-way shut. John Henry raises his head, pins his ears and threatens to bite as his rider tightens the girth too quickly for his taste. Each rider should respond to her horse's behavior in a way that either tells the horse "Yes, what you are doing is acceptable" or "No, you need to stop that right now." Even from the ground, people converse with their horse through body language and aids. Every time a person comes in contact with a horse, they are training that horse through their actions or inactions. By ignoring a horse who behaves inappropriately, the horse learns that it can get away with that behavior. Horses, like children, learn very quickly what they can get away with.

These training principles are not new. A Greek horseman and cavalry officer named Xenophon (430-335 B.C.), widely known as the “father of classical equitation” wrote the first riding manual. His revolutionary manual stressed mutual respect between horse and human. Xenophon understood that an animal with confidence in its rider would respond better to its rider’s commands. In his “Art of Horsemanship” Xenophon wrote, “The one great precept and practice in using a horse is this- never deal with him when you are in a fit of passion. When your horse shies at an object and is unwilling to go up to it, he should be shown that there is nothing fearful in it, least of all to a courageous horse like him; but if this fails, touch the object yourself that seems so dreadful to him, and lead him up to it with gentleness. Compulsion and blows inspire only the more fear; and when horses are at all hurt at such times, they think what they shied at is the cause of the hurt.” These founding techniques are still the basis of a relationship between man and rider today.

I walk through the aisle down to the observation area beside the spacious indoor arena. Newly painted jumps are arranged as a course, each fence designed to ask a different question of the horse and rider team. Questions of communication, unity and trust. The long seven stride line on the far side asks whether the rider can lengthen her horse’s stride the appropriate amount to create two uniform, round jumps. The skinny brush across the diagonal requires the rider to steer their horse precisely to the center. A colorful oxer with flowers lining the base begs horses to spook, forcing riders to sit up and drive forward. Each rider must approach the fence differently depending on what they feel their horse needs in order to jump successfully.

Although people have been riding horses for over 3,000 years, competitive obstacle jumping is comparatively new. The first mention of jumping appears in a French cavalry manual dated 1788. British foxhunters were forced to perfect their jumping abilities after the Enclosure Acts of the eighteenth century increased the number of hedges and fences around fields.

Records of jumping competitions came about 100 years later in Ireland which served as the leader of both steeplechasing and show jumping. The 1865 Royal Dublin Society's annual show hosted competitions for both "high" and "wide" leaps. In the United States, the National Horse Show began at Madison Square in New York in 1883 and the second Modern Olympic Games hosted by Paris in 1900 held three jumping competitions, including the "high" and "wide." Olympic equestrian events prior to World War II allowed only cavalry officers on active duty to participate. In 1948, a few civilians rode and in 1952 women were permitted to ride in dressage. Finally in 1956, women got their chance to compete on jumpers in the Olympics. Today, there are three main types of jumping classes at shows: hunters, jumpers, and equitation. A judge picks a winning hunter horse based on the horse's style, performance, manners, grace, movement and the smoothness of the course. Jumper horses perform over a course of larger, spookier fences, the goal being to avoid knocking down any of the rails while doing the course as fast as possible. Tighter turns, harder combinations and more aggressive rounds are required of jumpers. Equitation combines both hunter and jumper elements, but in this type of class the rider is judged, not the horse.

In the well lit arena, six beginning students taking a lesson start practicing jumping their horses over the low obstacles. The instructor, a young, enthusiastic woman with a bubbling personality explains to each what they did correctly and incorrectly over the first fence. One girl unknowingly punished her horse over the crest of the fence by pulling back on his mouth. Another threw her horse's balance off by not staying with the motion of his arc. The riders eagerly trot off to put the instructor's words of advice into action. Some overcorrect for their previous mistakes, a few make the mistake again, while others manage to ride the fence without fault. Riders learn from watching each other as well as feeling the responses that their own horses gave them after the application of a specific aid.

Aids. Such a small word carries such a huge meaning in

terms of communication with a horse. When a rider sits on her horse's back, she has four natural aids that help her correspond with the animal beneath her. Through the rider's use of weight, voice, hand and leg, a properly schooled horse understands what is being asked of it. A rider may use different combinations of their aids to ask the horse to complete different tasks. The rider should use the minimum amount of aid that it takes to get the horse to respond or else the aid becomes abuse, which here means the unintentional mistreatment of a horse due to uneducated riding. If a rider continually uses more of an aid than the horse actually needs, then the horse will eventually become dull and the rider will have to use more and more aid to get a response. Miscommunication between horse and rider most often occurs when an uneducated rider uses her aids incorrectly. Therefore, a rider's understanding of how their actions influence the horse is crucial in riding to avoid abuse. As much as every trainer, rider, or horse handler wishes for a working and respectful relationship with their horse, a lack of education, experience or patience often results in a less than harmonious ride. Whether a rider realizes it or not, every time they sit on a horse they train it. Even a raw beginner teaches a horse. The training does not even have to occur from the saddle. If a horse bites someone and that person does not punish the horse, the horse just learned that it can bite.

At a higher level of riding, the use of the aids comes naturally and instinctively. If the horse makes a mistake, an experienced rider easily corrects the problem, often without even thinking about it. As a result, the horse trusts the rider's decisions and believes that the rider will follow up on their requests. A horse schooled by an advanced rider responds much more readily to the rider's commands because it recognizes that if it does not respond negative consequences will follow.

As I watch, I turn my attention to a lone rider on a young bay horse at the far end of the arena. The small horse is dwarfed by his lean rider's long legs wrapped around the horse's body. The horse, clearly inexperienced, moves with awkward

strides, as if he hesitates to put his hooves down. Clearly open to communication, he listens to the rider's quiet aids. She sits tall and still upon his back, her aids nonexistent to everyone but the horse. He feels her movement and the light pressures she uses to ask him to go forward, come back and move to the side. The rider teaches him how to carry himself and move freely, despite the restraints of the tack and her weight. At this point in his training, the bay horse remembers no bad experiences or times when the rider did not work with him, so the rider is able to shape him as she wishes. He works with her as long as she treats him with respect and with the utmost amount of care. As long as this horse remains unscarred by rough hands or an uneducated seat and legs, he will continue to want to please those around him.

This girl reminds me of myself riding my own horse Kahlua, a small, dainty, chestnut and white pinto mare. My parents bought her for me when she was only four years old and I spent everyday after school training her how to respond to different combinations of aids. We spent hours on the lunge line as I taught her voice commands and the proper way to bend and flex on a circle. As she progressed, I started riding her. She picked up on what I wanted very quickly and I could only do an exercise with her a couple of times before she started to anticipate my cues. I had to ride calmly, yet firmly to help her slow down and think about what she did, rather than rushing through an exercise that she considered boring. We competed in hunters, jumpers and equitation, but we did the best in the jumpers because she loved to fly over the colorful 3'6" jumps with "scary" walls and boxes beneath them. Over a couple of years of showing we eventually won four regional championships, four reserve championships, and placed fifth at a national competition. Although the winning was gratifying, my favorite memories are of us cantering through grassy fields with a couple of friends. Unlike some of the show horses that spend their entire lives working on perfecting the same exercises in an arena, the basics that I taught Kahlua developed a trust deep

enough so that she came when I called, stayed with me if I fell off and followed me without a halter or lead rope.

I notice another instructor working with students in the large outdoor arena. An older woman with a sharper voice and harsher tone, she teaches in a different manner than the instructor inside. This woman obviously knows what she teaches from years of personal experience and observation. Her students show an advanced level of skill, but as one trots by I see her face pink with frustration. I imagine that she feels frustrated by the fact that the instructor constantly picks and nags at her without explaining what she wants. Both instructor and rider fail to follow a rule of common sense, explained by the prominent trainer Geoff Teall. He says, "Whenever emotion figures in your schooling or training equation, you make bad judgment calls and your horse gets hurt. If you find yourself feeling angry, strong, or rough, stop what you're doing and take a break or get off and put him up. Tomorrow's another day." Although this advice aims to address a rider's problem of taking out anger on her horse, a trainer should also remember it in the context of not getting frustrated when a student has trouble. John Madden explains, "Training horses and riders is the same way. Competitive success isn't about quick fixes or having a lucky day. . . Skip steps to try to get yourself and your horse ahead faster, and you'll spend longer correcting the problems that result." As I watch, they continue through the lesson, but as the rider's frustration level rises, her riding grows worse and the horse begins stiffening his muscles and swishing his tail violently. The instructor keeps nagging and by the end of the lesson, horse, rider and instructor all display clear signs of aggravation.

It's time for me to tack up Closing for my own lesson. I start the walk down the drive to the hunter barn, swinging my crop and watching as two horses play in the pasture beside the road. Closing lives in a stall near the far end of the barn, so I lay my helmet and purse down in the tack room and then walk down to get him. Still a bit dirty from a night in the pasture, Closing munches quietly on hay in the corner of his airy stall. I grab the

halter hanging on his door and wrestle him away from his lunch. We walk back towards the tack room and I cross-tie him in the aisle, removing his lead rope. I begin to brush his fuzzy winter coat with a curry comb, gently scrubbing caked mud from his lower legs and underside. A cold gust of wind blows through the barn sending chills through both of us. I curry harder and faster attempting to keep both of us a little warmer while Closing walks around in the cross ties, swishing his tail in an irritated fashion. Finally, the mud swirls around the floor as a pile of dust and I clean Closing with a hard brush. He continues to walk around, even though I ask him not to. My first trainer once said, "Choose your battles and choose those that you can win." I let him get away with it.

I step into the tack room and peek at the board, noting that Closing takes a narrow saddle and a thin-line pad. He also wears front boots, back boots and bells. I gather the correct equipment and step back out into the aisle, ready to outfit Closing with everything we need for a successful ride. Impatient, he paws the ground with his front left hoof. I smack his shoulder, telling him to knock it off. He shakes his head at me, but does stop the pawing. I reward him with a pat and then carefully place the saddle pad over his withers and slide it back to the correct position so that his coat lays smoothly beneath it. I lay the thin-line on top of the fleece pad and hoist the saddle on top of both. I walk around his haunches to the other side and buckle the girth onto the two outside billet straps beneath the saddle flap. In anticipation of what he knows will be next, Closing puts his head up and pins his ears. I return to his left side, lean under his belly and grab the girth pulling it across his barrel. I fasten it on the lowest hole and leave Closing to get adjusted to the belt. Once again, I return to the tack room to grab Closing's bridle and my helmet, gloves and crop. The last girl to ride Closing forgot to rinse his bit, so I take a sponge and some water and remove the residue. I return to the aisle, tighten Closing's girth another hole and then put the halter around his neck, preparing for the bridle. He easily slips the bit into his mouth and I pull the

headstall over his ears and then fasten the throat latch and nose band. I unfasten his halter completely, hang it by the cross ties, loop the reins over my arm and put my own helmet and gloves on. Closing and I saunter down the aisle, turn up the driveway and to the mounting block waiting for us by the fence. I tighten his girth one last time, lead him right up to the wooden box, run down the irons, put the reins over his head and then step up onto the box. I tighten my hold on the reins, put my left foot into the iron and swing my right leg over Closing's tall back. Before the fourteenth century, women rode astride wearing a split skirt, however they ran into trouble if the split skirt was not the proper outfit for her destination. Richard II's wife, Anne of Bohemia, introduced the sidesaddle to England to make it easier for women in fancy attire to get from one place to another. This fashion lasted until World War II because the men who typically filled their days with hunting, point-to-points, and polo left for the war and women were left to manage the stables. In order to ride as well as men and continue training the horses, these women had to leave their sidesaddles behind.

Closing stands motionless as I adjust my irons to the appropriate length and organize my position. Squeezing my legs against his sides, I ask Closing to walk forward onto the road. He willingly obliges and we begin our way up to the main barn and arenas. I think about what I want to accomplish in this lesson. As my last ride before the equitrial, I know that the practice must reaffirm what we both already know and give us confidence to ride well in the show.

Closing and I walk into the arena, ready to begin our warm-up in preparation for the dressage-like test we are about to practice. The basic dressage principles, established by the ancient Greeks, were developed to train horses for military use. The term *dressage* came into use in the early eighteenth century and comes from the French verb *dresser*, meaning to train, adjust, or straighten out. After military technology developed, machines were more practical than horses for war use, so dressage transitioned from a military and aristocratic activity to a civilian

sport. Aside from individuals practicing dressage for their own pleasure and for the improvement of their horses, the public may experience dressage at competitive events or at dressage displays, the most famous being the Spanish Riding School in Vienna. Competitive dressage ranges from local schooling shows to the Olympic Games. Approved competitions are governed by the Dressage Bureau of the International Equestrian Federation, which establishes rules for performance standards, qualifications, and issues concerning judges and competition organizers. The highest priority of this organization and most dressage trainers is to maintain the purity of classical riding theory and to prevent the growth of false training methods that would lead to lower standards. In competition, riders memorize a test of movements at their ability level and then ride it in front of one or several judges. An average test takes eight to twelve minutes to perform in a rectangular arena. All dressage arenas use a conventional lettering system to indicate to both riders and judges where each movement should begin and end. The origins of this seemingly illogical system are unknown.

I ask Closing to do some stretching exercises while we wait for my instructor to enter the ring. Five minutes later, she hops over the arena wall. My instructor leads Closing and me through a thorough, but short warm up and then watches as we run through our program ride or dressage test. As the first part of the three-phase equitrial, the program ride sets the tone for the entire day of showing and is a rider's first opportunity to show the judge what she can do. I trot Closing straight down the center line, beginning our test with impulsion and connectivity. Instead of falling onto his shoulders and leaning on my hand, Closing propels us forward with his hind legs. His uphill stride, balanced and flowing, establishes a good start for the ride. When we reach the end, it's a left hand turn to start a four loop serpentine. We lose a bit of our energy in the turn, but the lines are straight and Closing bends properly in the corners. At X (the center of the arena), we halt, back four steps and then finish the last two loops of the serpentine. Next, I lengthen

Closing's stride across the diagonal. The program ride does not ask for a sudden transition to the lengthened trot, as you might expect in a dressage test, but a gradual opening and expansion of the stride so that once we reach X again, Closing's steps are noticeably longer. At M, we transition into a working trot again and then jump the small vertical on the quarter line. Then, we walk again at A and continue with the remaining movements of the test. Although we aim for perfection, there are a few hiccups in the flow of the test. For instance, our counter canter transition occurs a few strides past B, rather than right in front of it, and the serviceable halt lacks polish, though Closing stands still. No huge mistakes, but not perfect.

We finish the test and my instructor points out all of the errors. We practice a few of the most problematic movements again and then relocate to the outdoor arena to practice one of our jump courses.

Closing and I take a few low warm-up fences at the canter and then my instructor gives me the equitation course to memorize. Then, I make an opening circle and head for the first fence. We meet it a little long, but reorganize and canter for the second fence, finding a short distance. Immediately upon landing, I ask Closing to lengthen his stride so that we can cover enough ground to get to the next fence in five strides. Somehow, he stretches out and we achieve the proper number of strides, but it lacks the smooth style typical of the winning equitation ride. I focus my attention around the corner to the roll-top, hoping to attain a better distance. I misjudge once again and we get deep. My instructor yells for me to stop, so I pull Closing up, frustrated with myself for making a mistake that I know how to prevent. She explains that the reason riders often miss their spots results from a lack of impulsion (impulsion: the amount of energy in a horse's stride, not the length of step or speed). The rider sees a deep distance to the fence or a distance that is much too long for the amount of impulsion the horse has. The rider then has two options: 1) position the horse at the deep spot and then struggle to lengthen the stride to the next fence or 2) ask the horse to

jump the fence from the long spot, in which case the horse will either make a weak attempt or add a tiny extra stride right before the fence. Neither option lends itself to a flowing, pleasant ride because each requires a dramatic change in the horse's rhythm.

The best solution lies in picking up a canter with more impulsion than the rider feels the jump requires. By doing this, the rider should have a better amount of impulsion and find a pleasing spot to the fence. With all of this theory in mind, I encourage Closing to canter once again. On our large, opening circle, I ask Closing for more impulsion and then we settle into a consistent pace and head towards a jump with straw bales and pumpkins. I count his rhythm in my head, keep the pace the same, find a good distance and allow Closing to take us over the fence. With a successful first jump, we have a much easier time with the other nine fences on course. After each jumping effort, I request that Closing return to the same rhythm and pace that we had for the first fence. He has enough impulsion throughout the course so that if I see a distance that looks as though we will meet it long or short, he has enough energy for me to adjust his stride. When we finish the course, my instructor and I further discuss the course strategy of where to turn, how to construct an opening circle that sets a good tone for the entire ride, and the advantages and disadvantages of one track over another.

As Closing and I leave the ring, I feel overwhelmed by the amount of information I have to remember for my rides tomorrow at the equitrial. So much has to go well in order to produce a perfect ride. The more I overanalyze, the more impossible it seems. I take Closing back to his stall and put him away for the evening.

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I don't even remember the first time I sat on a horse, but something must have piqued my interest early on. In one of the old family photo albums there are pictures of me at age 2 sitting on my aunt's pony Marshmallow. The fuzzy white pony, with his back only as tall as my aunt's thigh, stood with his eyes half shut as I gleefully held onto the horn of the western saddle, my legs

not even close to long enough to reach the stirrups. My aunt held the pony's lead rope as we walked around the barn aisle. While I don't remember this pony or my ride on him, I do remember begging my parents for riding lessons and a pony of my own. In first grade my goal was to become the youngest rider ever to compete in the Olympics. As I grew I spent all of my free time playing with model horses and cantering over branches in my own back yard. I continued to take lessons, learning how much more I needed to know to become the best rider and trainer. I encouraged my two best friends to start taking lessons and a few years later, they both had their own horses too. We spent every afternoon riding and showing together, from fourth grade up until senior year in high school.

*

The following day, I wake up early, catch a ride out to the barn and spend the morning volunteering as the judge's scribe for the lower levels of the competition. This helps the judge, but it also gives me insight into how rides are scored. Also, especially at a time when controversy surrounds equitation judges' cards, I enjoy watching how this judge scores. Right now many trainers are upset because some equitation judges give ribbons to riders on flat jumpers who take long approaches to fences and sit down around the whole course. When judges look exclusively for the number of strides in a line or a takeoff distance to a fence, they end up rewarding mediocre riding. Missy Clark, a top trainer of equitation riders explains, "I'm concerned that some judges aren't pinning the discipline as the hybrid of hunter and jumper riding that it's intended to be. Instead, they're judging equitation as if it were an end in itself." I continue to watch, listen and write down the judge's comments about each rider's movements during their program ride. I agree with her remarks and scores, but more importantly I believe that she really does have an excellent understanding of what constitutes "good riding" and pins the class accordingly.

By mid-morning another scribe comes to take my place and I am excused to prepare for my own classes. I walk into the

Bailey Room to pick up my number and a black shoelace to tie it to my back. I gather all of my show clothes together and head down to the hunter barn to get Closing ready. His coat, matted with mud, requires an extra amount of grooming. I tack him up with show tack, rather than his typical schooling gear. I slip into the tack room to change into my own show clothes. My tall field boots and wool hunt coat leave me feeling hot and constricted. I put my hair into a ponytail and then use clips and a hairnet to catch all of the wispy hairs. Carefully, I set the helmet on my head and push all of the hair beneath it. A polished appearance of both horse and rider demonstrates respect for the judge and the sport.

Other riders mill around preparing their own horses for the show. The noise in the barn, much less than usual, shows that the riders are getting into their “show ring” mentality. The radio sits quiet on its shelf, horses that are not showing are out in the pasture, and riders don’t even acknowledge each other. The intense atmosphere feels too heavy for the beautiful fall morning. Excitement saturates the air. I suffer from nervous anticipation as well. I am not worried about riding in front of the judge or even placing well, but I feel like I need to prove myself to the upper class women in my event. Not that I feel the need to beat them in competition, but I hope to gain their respect and a place among their ranks.

Closing and I walk up to the main barn and arena and then my instructor comes to start warming us up before our program ride. We work on the same movements as the day before, but my instructor prepares me mentally as well as physically for the ride. She has me think about my breathing and staying relaxed during the ride. One more time, I mentally go through all of the movements, imagining each one being performed perfectly. I loosen Closing’s girth and stand with him beside the ring, watching some of the other rides as we wait for our turn. Just as each rider has their own strengths and weaknesses, so does each round. I learn a lot from watching the rounds and then hearing what the trainers have to say to the

student afterwards. One girl's horse spooked in the far corner and the girl corrected him for it, but she let the problem upset her and the rest of her ride. What a shame that she became so focused on the negative event in her ride that she couldn't regain her concentration to focus on completing her next movements successfully. Another girl had a few mistakes in her ride, but when she came out of the arena, I could see that the ride pleased her because she kept her back flat throughout. Her ride acted as the ultimate demonstration of the idea that even if you don't win, but the one thing that you have been working really hard on has improved, you are a success in a real sense. One of the last girls to ride, mounted on a tall, thin chestnut, exhibited wonderful presence in the ring. The two of them personified grace, ease and elegance. As soon as they stepped into the show ring, they gave the impression that they wanted to win and had the ability to do so. These two showed self confidence, preparation and refinement in every movement. They completed the test beautifully and at the end of the day had a blue ribbon.

Closing and I practice a few of the tough movements once again right before we go into the ring. We cement everything we already know into place, have a short canter, listen for the judge to ring her bell and then enter at A with a forward working trot rising. The fluid test leaves a respectable impression of us in the judge's mind. Each movement drifts right into the next, with each transition occurring at the appropriate letter. I allow Closing to display all of the power and grace that he would in a natural environment. I want the judge to focus on everything that he does correctly and beautifully and not even notice that I am guiding him from one movement to the next. Supple, submissive, and without resistance, he listens to what I ask him to do. We softly glide into the halt at X, our last movement, and then exit the arena to a light patter of appreciative applause.

I dismount and lead Closing over to where my instructor stands. She asks, "What do you think of your ride?" I tell her that I thought it had some not-so-perfect moments, but that overall I felt very comfortable with the way it turned out. My

instructor agrees and even goes further to say that the ride was pleasant to watch and very acceptable. This boosts my confidence greatly.

I walk Closing to the outdoor arena and mount up. Soon, my instructor comes out and we take three practice jumps before the second section of the equitrial begins. In the order of go, I am the first rider to do the course. Closing and I canter a large opening circle. I establish the pace necessary for the ride and then settle for the first fence. We jump well and then make a smooth right hand turn to a five-stride line of coops along the outside rail. Next we make another right hand turn to a wooden roll top and a bending line to an oxer with yellow flower boxes in front, but instead of jumping the flowers, Closing stops. I put him to a good distance and gave him the reins, but for some reason, he just said no. Who knows what went through his mind as we approached that fence? As an animal, not a machine, he experiences feelings and makes decisions. His decision at that fence left me shocked and disappointed, but not angry. I circle around to the fence again and he jumps without hesitation. We finish the course cleanly and with strength. Although I wonder what happened at the yellow flowers, I am glad that the rest of the course encompassed the principles of a reputable equitation ride.

Instead of staying to watch the other riders complete the course, I walk Closing out to the field and memorize the next course. The field course tests riders differently than the ride in the arena. Both are judged based on equitation, but the field ride incorporates natural elements, such as solid log fences, hilly terrain, and a small bank. This encourages riders to think and adapt their plan during the ride based on what their horse does in response to the questions being asked. Despite my lack of experience in field jumping, the course looks quite doable, except the bank. Having never ridden a bank, I am not quite sure what to expect. I walk Closing over to it to take a look. The footing on the approach looks horrific with deep spots and uneven ground. The bank sits in the shadows of the two trees on either side of

the drop. The opening between the tree's branches won't allow much room for error, so I make a mental note to steer directly to the middle.

By the time I finish making my plan, the other riders are done with their courses and I can see them starting to meander on over to the field. Once again, I am first in the order of go. I confer with my instructor and get a few last words of advice, the most important, - a reminder to breathe during the course. I get the signal to go from the judge and then make my last opening circle of the day. Closing and I canter towards a red brick wall and towards the setting sun. The light, so bright and blinding makes it impossible to see my spot to the fence. I am forced to rely completely on feeling and rhythm to create a good jump. I experience a sense of oneness and completeness with Closing. We are connected as he listens and responds to my subtle aids. I focus entirely on our present ride. Nothing in the past or future has any relevance. Everything, except the ride, voids my mind as I count the rhythm, absorbing Closing's impulsion in my knees and hips. All of the nervousness from my previous rounds dissipates as I focus, once again, on the present. "One, two, three, four," I count his strides, finding myself in an incredible rhythm. I forget about everyone standing by the edge watching. Closing and I arch over a small picket and then up a hill, down another and to the bank. We move through the deep footing and over the bank in stride.

Colleen Karaffa

My Sister

She buys pretty things
she doesn't wear,
stores them in her lockbox
where they wait
building up to piles of useless beauty.

She's got earrings
that haven't set aglow her earlobes,
a necklace with emeralds
she knows flatter her eyes,
shoes, French ones,
with bows and a scarlet hat
that makes her face look like a kissable heart.

But I've only seen her put it on
when she dances around the room
like her dream is coming.
The door is always cracked,
usually she has music going,
either slow jazz - she says -
has a solitary sound
or exotic melodies
with bongo drums - those she says -
have the sound of something coming.

Peculiar that she always wears the same stuff out:
fake silver balls in her ears,
brown leather shoes mom bought for her --
pretty ratty now,
that bluish sweater she stole from me
'cause my theory is she's saving hers up
for the right moment.

Once I said,
what's all the pretty stuff for
if you never wear it?
And she looked in my eyes like
I had let loose her secret
to someone else,
to a room full of people.

There's a difference between us --
I'm not quiet like her when we go out.
I don't wait for the perfect night
to wear my new satin blouse,
I just wear it, and sometimes I wish I didn't
like her, she saves hers from staining and from washing
so she can wear it on that perfect night,
if it ever comes.

Insufficient Postage

Saadiyah found the letter between a package of the American's cigarettes and fragments from his shattered skull. The bullet had carved a hunk from the side of his head and sent the soft tissue within spiraling through the air. When his compatriots moved him, the broken pieces were left behind; the cigarettes and envelope tumbled from his person. Saadiyah saw this through the kitchen window. Her Akil had died outside someone else's window two weeks earlier. The American was taller, huskier, but only a few years older. Had God seen things a different way, they could have been brothers.

Saadiyah waited until the road emptied; she picked up the discarded items. A pink, wet chunk clung to the back of the letter. She brushed it off, as one might a fleck of dirt, an errant insect, and turned the envelope over in her hands. The paper was slightly crumpled, yellowed by its former proximity to its former owner. Between her chafed and blistered fingers, she thought it might still be warm. Down the street, other women peered from behind other curtains. Watching.

Inside, Saadiyah laid the letter and cigarettes on her scratched tabletop. Right after Akil died, the house had been searched for weaponry. In their imperfect Arabic, herding her family with their guns as one might cattle, the Americans ordered them into different rooms while they opened bureaus, overturned furniture.

The guns were as smooth and black as oil; one had ended Akil, another the American. Saadiyah was old – too old to make babies, too young for her daughters to. Old enough not to fear the guns. They made pain and blood but she accepted their presence. She wished sometimes that Akil had feared them more.

Children learned to be weapons in wars before this and she imagined that they would for wars after. Akil was not

a weapon on the day he died but he might have been. Anyone might be in Afghanistan and the Americans feared this. They learned to suspect the children and the mothers; they learned to shoot. Some shot with their eyes closed, some prayed. Maybe the American outside her window had done such a thing; maybe he had wept, or walked with haunted, bloodied eyes until the bullets came back to him. Maybe he had not.

Saadiyah drew a cigarette from the package and twisted it. Her hands were swollen in the scarce times, thick as a man's from age and use; the knuckles were shiny raw. She plucked the brown, dry insides from the cigarette, peeled back the sterile paper. She opened the envelope. The letter it contained lay prone on her table. Dear mother, she pretended to read. Dear father. I killed a man today. Or, we have recovered more arms from within the residences. Or, I miss you. Maybe it was not a letter at all. She traced the nonsensical symbols with her broken nails.

Akil would have told her to get rid of these things but she took them to her room. In a drawer, she kept a picture of him, the broken thong of his left sandal, the beads he wore around his wrist. She placed the American's forgotten possessions with her son's.

Had God seen things a different way, they could have been brothers.

Jessica Cornelison

In the Eyes of Angels



Samantha Heckert

Dem Bones

Todd, on a day shortly before his accident, stood before the army of sheep, waving his pencil and singing “Dem Bones,” as if he could save their vegetarian souls. A train hit him four days before my high school graduation and the party we had been planning that day was abruptly cancelled. When I crossed the stage to get my diploma and stand for my picture the principal grabbed my hand for a firm shake and then pulled me into a fatherly hug. Sitting in my seat onstage I looked at the three empty seats that my family had reserved and prayed that the photographer didn’t take the photo as Mr. Bauman was hugging me. It would be the only record of my graduation day.

For as long as Todd was able to communicate his thoughts to us, whether through screaming or otherwise, we knew that he had only two obsessions – Trains and the sheep. The trains were easy to explain, a lot of little boys love trains but the sheep were inexplicable. My mom was pretty worried, I told her to just let him like sheep, that I liked dogs and no one ever said anything to me.

“Darren, it’s a different story with your brother.” She always hissed at me when I tried to side with him a little bit.

When Todd was around three years old, he stopped talking. He was just like any other little kid up to that point, babbling away at anything since he’d just figured out how to put words together. Then one day he just stopped completely. He’d stare at the television for hours but wouldn’t look any person in the eyes; he acted like we weren’t even there most of the time. But if things got too noisy or crazy in the house he’d just drop to the floor and start screaming and kicking his legs in violent temper tantrums. At first Mom thought it was a phase, that he was reacting badly to our dad’s busy work schedule and to me being at school full-time. What made her finally take him to the first of his “Special Doctors” was when she left him in front of

the television for five minutes to go to the bathroom. She came out and he was standing by the coffee table holding half the glass potpourri bowl in one hand and streaming blood from the other; he was totally calm, still staring at the television.

“Any normal kid would have screamed Al, we’re taking him to a specialist.” She cried to my dad through hiccups when we picked them up from the hospital later that day. Todd sat next to me, staring at nothing, his hand full of stitches.

We lived in a development off a long country road. Mom thought it’d be nice for us to grow up around a lot of other kids so we moved there while she was pregnant with Todd. The long road we took to get to our development was full of livestock farmers and our backyards always smelled slightly of manure, but it never bothered any of the kids until we got older and knew what it was. The farm right before we turned onto our road raised sheep and as we crossed the train tracks we could look deep into the fields and see all the sheep dotting the hills. It was there that my brother said his first word since being diagnosed with Autism.

He was about five and we had just picked him up from his school that deals specifically with special education. Dad had slowed the car down like always so we could look at the sheep a little longer.

“SHEEP,” Todd cried in a high-pitched tinny voice. Dad slammed on the breaks and he and Mom broke their necks to look at him. They both started laughing and crying at the same time saying “sheep, sheep, sheep” to try to get him to talk again.

“They gave him a robot voice!” I screamed, thinking the school had given him a voice like they had given him pictures to help him convey his thoughts to us. Mom and Dad laughed until we pulled in our driveway and told that story about us to whoever would listen. I had been afraid that they might slip and tell it at my graduation party too.

When my mom talked to the doctor about Todd’s obsession with sheep he told her that he probably stemmed on both trains and sheep since he saw both of them while

driving home and he associated them with that happy feeling. She stopped worrying after that and actually encouraged the “stemming.”

“He’s not going to become functional if you encourage it, Karen.” My dad adjusted his glasses on his nose. At this point Todd was eight and still wasn’t speaking much; he could make an exact copy of anything he saw onto paper though, both words and pictures. He once drew a perfect Thomas the Tank Engine on his bedroom wall.

“He associates them with good feelings, and I want to encourage that. He has enough bad feelings in his head!” She didn’t come out of their room that night. After that every day at exactly four o’clock, one half hour after we got home from school, and seven minutes before the train was scheduled to pass our development, we would walk down to the end of the road to wave as the train passed. Once the train had gone we let Todd look at the sheep for exactly five minutes and then we’d walk home. We did this every day because it was part of his schedule, Mom, Dad, and I all had to be there too or it wouldn’t be the same as every other day and he’d get upset.

I took over Todd’s “Happy Moment” every day by accident. When I was fifteen and Todd was twelve our grandmother died and my mom had to organize all of the funeral arrangements. She usually did things while we were at school so she wouldn’t upset Todd’s schedule but somehow ended up with a four-thirty appointment and got so worked up over the inconvenience that my dad decided to go with her. No big deal, I’d helped Todd with some things before, and while he was difficult with me, he usually cooperated well enough after a while.

“Darren, just don’t do trains alright?” She whispered the word trains. “Everything else is the same but that.” Todd was sitting at the kitchen table drawing in his notebook, oblivious. At three fifty-five he stood up.

“TRAINS.” He went to get his coat. “MOM. DAD. DARREN. TRAINS.” He repeated his usual call for train time. I

wasn't supposed to do the trains today, but I was honestly a little worried about Todd having a fit, he was three years younger than I was but was nearly my size and strong. I couldn't restrain him alone. I grabbed my coat and ran to the front hall.

"No Mom. No Dad. Lets go!" I used some of the sign language I had learned to make sure he was listening to me and flung open the door just like it was every other time. I hoped he would just take the cue and go with it.

He stood there with a worried expression on his face, his brow furrowing deeper and deeper. He flattened his palms and started to bring them up to his ears – his way of shutting out the world and starting a fit. If I didn't do something he would fling himself on the ground and scream. I wasn't sure what to do so I just grabbed his hands and pulled him through the door singing "Dem Bones," his favorite song on the Silly Songs tape, and started walking down the street. He kept the hand I wasn't gripping to his ear but after two rounds of the song he had dropped it and was singing along.

The next day at four o'clock as my family made for the train Todd violently shoved my mom and dad back inside the house and walked with me down the street yelling "BONES. BONES." until I started singing with him. My parents were left on the front step looking after us as if they were dogs whose master had just gone.

Every day for two years, rain or shine, sick or healthy, Todd and I walked hand in hand to wave at the train. We started staying a bit longer to watch the sheep and our mom pretended not to be annoyed at the deference to the schedule when we came back late. Once I let Todd bring his pencil and notebook to see how well he could draw the sheep. We spent an extra fifteen minutes watching sheep that day, the longest ever. They came out as perfect puffy clouds with stick legs all over the page. He hung the drawing on the fridge with a Scooby-doo magnet as soon as we got home. It stayed there the whole summer after the accident but when I came home from college the picture and magnet were missing from display.

I wanted a lot of people to be invited to my graduation party. More people meant more money; I was even willing to have it the weekend after graduation so all my friends could come. It was perfectly logical; I also wanted my dad to get a keg.

“No one will drink but my friends dad! And they’ll sleep over!” I tried to persuade unsuccessfully.

“Yeah, right. Where in this house? Todd’s room? He’d LOVE that!” His face was red and he had already thrown his glasses on the table. I should have shut up by then but just couldn’t give up the idea of a keg party in the backyard. Mom was looking at the list of people, shaking her head and Todd was up in his room, drawing, trying to shut out the yelling. It calmed down eventually and the three of us were trying to narrow down the hundred and fifty head guest list when Mr. Gambino barged into our house, his face white and his eyes glazed, he kept repeating Todd’s name. I looked at the stove clock – 4:17.

After the accident the neighborhood somehow petitioned to get the tracks moved. Something about the development being unsafe with a train constantly passing through. I think it was a favor to my mom, she was friendly to everyone and the neighborhood respected her. Now the train passes at 4:07PM two miles west of our development, probably through a field of sheep.

I don’t think anyone really notices the train is gone, and if they do they are probably happy for the quiet, but I miss it. Whenever I come home I leave the house at exactly four o’clock, seven minutes before the train would pass, and walk to the end of the road singing “Dem Bones” at the top of my lungs. Just to make sure that everything with Todd stays right on schedule.

Lynnsey Kraus

Untitled



Ruth Mesfun

Danaus plexippus

The *Danaus plexippus*, also known as the monarch butterfly, always migrates south during the winter. They prefer the warm, sunny days in Florida to the frostbitten mornings here in Virginia; I don't blame them. However, I was lucky enough to see one in the middle of a snowy afternoon in January. All I could do was observe him and wonder, "Is my mind playing a trick on me?" He was the first encounter I ever had with a monarch butterfly, but I almost felt sorry for him. It seemed cruel of me to study him, knowing he was too cold and frightened to move. From his wide wings and his proud appearance, I could tell he was a male. The females are usually a lighter color with smaller wings.

I didn't have to take a close look to see his bold orange wings outlined with black and white speckles. The black seemed to seep into the orange like in a still-wet painting. The average monarch's wings are usually three to four inches in width, but his were five inches. He must have been a "babe magnet" to the female monarch butterflies. Usually, the bigger the males' wings are, the more females they attract. This is mainly because they can collect more pollen under their wings and use the scent as cologne. As I approached, I could smell the aroma of melted sugar with a hint of cinnamon on his wings; it was the scent of sunflowers. I saw that his head was covered with white speckles, and his abdomen and thorax were black and fuzzy. They were very soft, and reminded me of my favorite blanket. I finally summoned the courage to touch his wings, which were paper thin and felt like sheer fabric. I wondered how a butterfly so fragile could be feared by so many of its predators. After admiring the monarch butterfly, I realized that he had only one antenna.

I went to my professor, who saw the monarch and nodded in agreement; he was dead. She carefully took the butterfly back to his relatives and pinned him under the title *Danaus plexippus*. As I expected, he was in the center, brighter and bolder than all

the other butterflies. I asked my professor how a butterfly like him could die here in the winter. She shrugged and went back to her office. I put the butterfly display back with all the other insects, glanced back at the monarch one last time, and left the room. Even a monarch butterfly as great as he could die as easily as anyone else.

Michelle Degrin

Still Life



Elizabeth Zuckerman

The Thinker's Manifesto

I have heard
Some people say,
“Your read too much.
You do not play.”
“You think too much,”
I have been told,
“And too much thought
Makes living cold.”
To this I have
But one reply:
“If you know so much,
Tell me why,
In spite of thought,
I seem to thrive!
Because of thought,
I am alive.
So I'll not change
And kill my mind.
It is too dear
To leave behind.”

